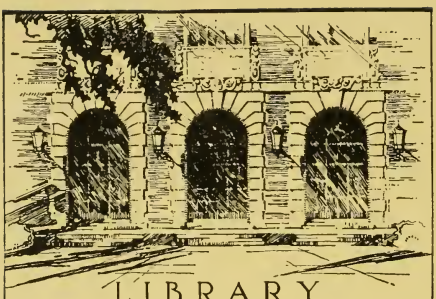

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THE

MOSAIC-WORKER'S DAUGHTER.

A NOVEL.

BY

J. M. CAPES.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE

MOSAIC-WORKER'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

MARGARET REPULSED.

"EVERYTHING seems to be going wrong with everybody," observed Margaret to her cousin a few days after Rinaldo's interview with Henry Noel. "What it all means I cannot conceive; but certainly everybody appears to have suddenly grown cross-grained and unpleasant."

"I hope you don't include me in the number of the disagreeables," returned Helen.

"You are not quite so bad as the rest, certainly," said Margaret; "but you are

pre-occupied in a most mysterious way, though I must confess that I catch you smiling more often than frowning."

"If I ever smile without telling you what amuses me, it is really because I fancy I see into the future a little more clearly than I used to see. An uninterested spectator always observes more than those who play the game."

"You an uninterested spectator!" echoed Margaret. "What can you possibly mean, Helen?"

"Simply what I say," replied Helen. "Whoever else is concerned in making everybody disagreeable, I am innocent of it altogether."

"Are you really serious, Helen?" asked Margaret, for the first time beginning to fancy that, after all, her cousin's idea as to what was going on might be the correct interpretation.

"As serious as I ever was in my life," replied Helen. "Nobody wants to marry

me, rest assured, whatever views may be entertained in another direction."

"But here is everybody put out by some mysterious influence or other," said Margaret. "The Marchese comes and sits, and stares, so far as his politeness will allow him to stare at all, first at you, and then at me, and then at my aunt, and then at Mr. Evelyn, if he happens to be here with him. Mr. Evelyn is every whit as bad, only in another way. Ever since his exploits on behalf of Francesca, he has been a changed man, and has not uttered a single paradox, or been in the smallest degree amusing. Then he is barely civil to the Marchese, and the formality of his politeness to the Cavaliere is positively intolerable. As to the way he treats me, it is incomprehensible, asking all sorts of out-of-the-way questions, with some hidden meaning or other, I feel assured.

"Then there is some screw loose between our friend D'Urbino and Francesca. He is

immensely annoyed at her refusal to sit to him, and I can see too that he does not like the obstinacy with which she still declines to account to her father for her proceedings when she was missing for so many hours on the day of the riot at the Coliseum. And as to Francesca herself, she is the worst of all. She is perfectly miserable about something—that is clear. But why she should have taken offence at anything I have done, is inexplicable. She says she has not taken offence at all, and only yesterday, when I was so annoyed that I wanted to leave her after just asking about her health, in some way or other she contrived to keep me an hour with her."

"Is there any other of our friends and acquaintances who has not thus deteriorated?" asked Helen. "We are a happy family, altogether, according to your estimate, Margaret."

"If Mr. Noel came, I dare say he would be as the rest," replied Margaret. "But he

shows his discretion by keeping away. That he is in the same boat with the rest of us, I am confident."

"How can you say that?" asked Helen.

"For two reasons," said Margaret. "First of all, he promised to bring me a book about the catacombs, several days ago, and he has neither brought it nor sent it; and in the second place, the Marchese accidentally let out the fact that he had a long conversation with him, and that he wanted to induce him to go away with him to Naples."

"By the way, Margaret," said Helen, interrupting her, as she was proceeding with her speculations, "I forgot to tell you who I saw going into Giorgione's house next door, yesterday morning. I may as well tell you, for you will never guess. Do you recollect the tall, stately, silent man, who was introduced to you at the French ball?"

"Yes, undoubtedly," replied Margaret,

looking not a little alarmed. "But surely, you don't mean that you saw him go into Francesca's father's house?"

"I do mean it, most certainly," said Helen.

"Impossible!" cried Margaret. "What, the Cameriere Rinaldo? Do you know who and what that man is? He is in the Papal household, having deserted the other side, and now plays the spy upon his former friends."

"I heard something about that a year ago," replied Helen; "but one gets so used to these kind of reports in Rome, that one ceases to believe them for more than a week or two. However, it was he who went into the mosaic-worker's house. Of that you may rest assured."

"Then there is mischief brewing somewhere," exclaimed Margaret. "That man could be there for no good purpose, whether it was Francesca or her father who was the object of his visit. Of course they will

neither of them tell me what his business was with them; but I think I can learn from Francesca whether it was she or her father that he came to see."

"If I were in your place, Margaret," replied Helen, "I would not see quite so much of that girl, until she has cleared up the mystery hanging about herself."

"Surely," returned Margaret, "you don't imagine there is anything seriously wrong about it. Girls of that class often have little secrets of their own, perfectly harmless, but yet which they are shy of talking about. I am as confident of Francesca's truth and goodness as of yours."

"I accept the implied compliment, Margaret," replied Helen, "though I am afraid I cannot value it as highly as you do yourself."

Margaret made no reply, but was relieved by the entrance of her aunt, and the conversation turned to less exciting topics.

In the course of the afternoon she found

her way to Francesca's bedroom, under the pretence of examining a piece of old Flemish oak furniture whose praises the mosaic-worker had lately sounded to her. Francesca was still languid, and responded feebly to the sincere praises which Margaret bestowed upon the rare beauty of the carving. Sitting down beside Francesca, she began to beat about for some way of leading her to talk about the supposed visit of Rinaldo.

"You must often feel dull and lonely, Francesca," she began, "sitting up here, unless you have friends to come and see you."

"I have not any friends whom I care to see," replied Francesca. "I do the best I can, like other people, I suppose," she added in a dreary tone enough.

"You ought not to speak of everything in that melancholy way, Francesca, at your age," said Margaret, "there are only a few years' difference between us, you know, and I can't at all enter into such feelings!"

"We are unlike in everything else, Miss

Osborne," rejoined Francesca. "It would have been better if you had never known me."

"What can you mean, Francesca?" asked Margaret.

"Nothing," replied Francesca.

"Nothing, Francesca?" said Margaret. "You are become perfectly incomprehensible, and everybody gets more incomprehensible every day, I think. You want change, I should think."

"I do want change," replied Francesca, looking so miserable, that Margaret had no heart to be angry with her for her rudeness. "Perhaps I shall leave Rome in a few days."

"And you really will not give Signor D'Urbino another sitting before you leave," said Margaret.

"There are other girls in Rome who will do as well," said Francesca, "and better looking than I am."

"Speaking of good-looking people," replied Margaret, resolved to dash at once into

the subject she came to talk about, "what a very striking face that gentleman has who paid your father a visit yesterday."

"What gentleman?" asked Francesca. "My father said nothing to me about any one; and I was up here alone all day."

"I think his name is Rinaldo," replied Margaret, her heart beating fast; "the Cameriere Rinaldo, I fancy he is called."

"Was he here yesterday?" cried Francesca, turning first a fiery red, and then to an ashy paleness.

Frightened at this effect of her words, but more resolved than before to ascertain the truth about the relations between Francesca and her father and this strange visitor, Margaret could only say that she had heard that the Cameriere had called, and that was all. Francesca's agitation, however, continued.

"Oh! how shall I bear it?" she cried, and hid her face in her hands. Then suddenly looking at Margaret, she went on:

"What else have you heard? Have

you seen my father to-day? Did he send you here to speak to me? Oh! I know what he will say: he will never forgive me."

Margaret took the agitated girl's hand in her own, and tried to sooth and calm her.

"What is it all?" she asked. "I am utterly in the dark, Francesca; I am sure you have done nothing that your father would be pained to hear."

"Oh, Miss Osborne," cried Francesca, "you don't know his pride, and the anger he would feel, and the shame. And oh! if Signor Rinaldo has betrayed me, I could never look in his face again."

"Betrayed you, Francesca?" replied Margaret; "what connection can there be between you and this odious man? It is impossible that he can have been employing you in his own detestable business."

"I don't know anything about his business, but I think he is a gentleman," said Francesca, scarcely less excited still.

"Then you don't know that he is a paid

traitor, a spy?" asked Margaret, dreading the answer she asked for.

"I know nothing about him at all," rejoined Francesca.

"But you know *him*, Francesca," rejoined Margaret, "or, at any rate, he knows something about *you*, which you are afraid he has communicated to your father. Surely you must see that this is a most extraordinary admission, and you must let me beg of you, as a friend, to explain it all to your father without more delay."

"I cannot tell him now. I promised to tell him some day, and he was satisfied," replied Francesca.

"But this must have been before the visit this man paid him yesterday?" inquired Margaret.

"Don't ask me," pleaded Francesca; "don't press me. I have done nothing that is wrong, but I could not tell my father; and this gentleman has now come and betrayed me."

"Betrayed you?" cried Margaret. "Again you say he has betrayed you. If I am to serve you, you must trust me, and give me your complete confidence."

"I do not ask you to serve me," rejoined Francesca, "and you are the last woman in the world to have my confidence. It is cruelty and mockery in you to come and offer to be my friend. And yet you do it all in ignorance, and I am mad with my folly and ingratitude. God have mercy upon me!"

"But Francesca," said Margaret, "you are doing yourself a serious mischief by keeping back the secret from your father. Signor D'Urbino was talking to me about it yesterday, and he says your conduct is inexplicable, and is convinced that in some way or other your refusal to assist him in finishing his work is connected with this story about you."

"Does *he* know of it?" exclaimed Francesca, again manifesting signs of the utmost

distress and terror. "For God's sake, say he does not."

"Of course he knows," said Margaret, "and other people must know also. You must be aware that when a girl is once talked about, people are very quick in putting the worst meanings upon everything."

"It is too dreadful altogether," cried Francesca. "I wish I were dead and at rest once for all."

"And you will not trust me, Francesca," said Margaret, again taking the poor girl's hands within her own.

"Was he a long time with you yesterday, Miss Osborne?" asked Francesca, keeping her eyes fixed on the ground.

"Whom do you mean?" said Margaret. "There were various people with us yesterday."

"The gentleman who you said knew something about me," said Francesca.

"Signor D'Urbino?" asked Margaret.

"Yes, he was with us a long time. He brought us some drawings of his own to show us. And what a clever and agreeable man he is. If he talks as pleasantly to his models as he did to us, he will find plenty of people glad enough to sit to him. But why do your hands shake so violently, Francesca? You are too ill for this exciting talk. I had better go, I am sure."

"No! no! no!" cried Francesca. "Go on talking; I will try to bear it."

"But why should you try to bear it when nothing comes of it?"

"You are right," replied Francesca, in a voice of despair. "Nothing does come of it, or can come of it. But go on, nevertheless. Even from you I can bear it. Oh, no! God help me! I can bear it no longer! Leave me, and let me die! It is the way with us Italian women; you English women suffer and live, but we suffer and die."

"This is madness, Francesca," rejoined Margaret. "Your illness and fatigue have

been too much for you. You must take rest, or you will really lose your senses."

"I *have* lost them," cried Francesca, bitterly; "but it is not rest that will cure me, except the rest of death."

"And there is no way in which I can help you?" asked Margaret.

Francesca shook her head, but made no reply. Then, as Margaret rose to go, she suddenly exclaimed—

"You said that this gentleman was seen to come here yesterday. Did you see him yourself? Or perhaps it was a mistake, and he never came at all."

"It was my cousin that saw him," said Margaret.

"Your cousin, Miss Sandford?" inquired Francesca.

"The same," said Margaret.

"Do you think she would be so kind as to condescend to see me about it?" asked Francesca.

"There is no condescension in the matter,

Francesca," said Margaret; "but she is confident that she was not mistaken. However, I have no doubt she will come." And with the promise to send her as soon as possible, Margaret left the house.

CHAPTER II.

FRANCESCA'S CONFESSION.

"WELL," exclaimed Helen, as soon as she was alone with her cousin, "what new embroilment have you stumbled upon, Margaret? You look the very personification of perplexity. I believe I shall soon be the sole representative of common sense and amiability among us all."

"You are not going to escape without having your amiability put to the test," replied Margaret. "That incomprehensible girl entreats you to go and see her as soon as you can."

"What in the name of common sense does she want with me?" asked Helen.

"She wants to catechise you about this

same Rinaldo," said Margaret. "She has got it into her head that possibly you were mistaken when you saw him yesterday."

"Then the visit was not to her," said Helen.

"No, she says not," said Margaret; "but nevertheless her agitation was frightful when she heard that he had been to see her father. In some way that infamous man has got her into his power, and knows something about her which she refuses to reveal to her father. I offered to help her in any possible way she could name, but she coolly told me that of all women in the world I was the last to help her."

"Cool, certainly, after your absurd interest in her affairs," replied Helen.

"Cool, in a metaphorical sense only," said Margaret, "for her distress and passion are quite miserable to see. I suppose it is the way with those hot-blooded Southerns. She says she is going to die, and she almost looks as if it were true."

"I have heard of such things before," said Helen. "The other day I heard of a grown-up man taking to his bed, because of some absurd disappointment, and actually dying with rage and thwarted desire for revenge."

"But you will look in upon the poor girl, nevertheless, I hope," said Margaret.

"I suppose I must," said Helen, "though it's rather against my liking."

The next morning she went, and was received with a sort of stately politeness, which rather took her aback, considering that she held herself to be very decidedly condescending in meddling with the matter at all. Still with all Helen's aristocratic possessions, it was impossible to take offence, as Francesca's manner violated no conventional rules of respect, though all the while she took no pains to conceal her conviction that whatever might be the difference in position between the wealthy English heiress and the poor mosaic-worker's daughter, as women they were absolutely equal. It was

all spontaneous enough on Francesca's part, and she would have been astonished to be told that she really exhibited more personal deference to the more genial and simple-minded Miss Osborne than to her prouder but not less well bred cousin.

"You wished to see me, my cousin tells me, Francesca," Helen began, "on the subject of a person who was here lately."

"I should like a little conversation with you, Miss Sandford," replied Francesca, "on one or two things, if you can spare a few minutes. Miss Osborne thinks that you saw a gentleman—or a person, as you call him—entering this house two days ago. Was it really the Cameriere Rinaldo, do you think, or only some one very like him in face and figure?"

"I have not a shadow of a doubt that it was that person, or gentleman, if you please, himself."

"Is he not a gentleman, then?" asked Francesca. "I was told that he is so."

"He holds a post which is supposed to be

held by gentlemen," replied Helen, "but many people are called gentlemen who are far from having the principles of gentlemen."

"Perhaps you have not seen him often enough to be sure that it was he whom you saw two days ago," suggested Francesca.

"Yes, quite often enough," replied Helen. "How often have you seen him yourself, and when did you see him last?"

Instantly alive to the bearing of these questions, and dreading to be closely pressed, Francesca looked away, as if her thoughts were fixed elsewhere. The device was too transparent to deceive Helen, who was resolved not to be sent summarily away, after her condescension in responding to Francesca's request.

"I saw Signor Rinaldo," she continued, "at a ball quite lately. When did you see him last, yourself?"

"Not very long ago," murmured Francesca; "but why did you ask?"

"Why do you wish not to give me a

straightforward answer?" replied Helen, with a *brusquerie* far unlike the sympathetic gentleness that Margaret had showed to Francesca, even when most irritated by her waywardness. Then seeing the sad and weary look of the poor girl's face, and the deep hollows round her eyes, telling the acuteness of the sufferings she had been undergoing, her woman's heart relented, and she went on in a kinder voice.

"You must forgive me," she said, "if I spoke a little roughly, but you know what strange things are said about you, and it is a most unfortunate circumstance that your name should have got mixed up with that of this man."

"He has been very kind to me," murmured Francesca, and the tears slowly dropped from her eyes, touched as she was by the change in Helen's manner to her.

"Then you do know him?" instantly said Helen.

"Do not ask me any more," said Fran-

cesca; "Oh! I am so weary!" and she leaned back upon her chair, as if she could bear no more.

"Surely — surely!" exclaimed Helen. "No! that is impossible."

"What is impossible?" cried Francesca, starting up at the words, and pressing her hand to her heart. "What do you mean, Miss Sandford; tell me, tell me, what is it you are suspecting?"

"No! it is too absurd to be true," said Helen. "It is so absurd that I may say what crossed my thoughts, and you will laugh at it. It positively occurred to me, that you might—Francesca, you must forgive me if I seem a little impertinent in saying this to a girl of whom I really know but little—I thought you might have taken some foolish fancy to this gentleman."

"I don't understand you in the smallest degree," said Francesca, astonished.

"That you might love him," replied Helen, after a little hesitation.

"Love *him!*" echoed Francesca; "oh! my God! no!"

"But there is love somewhere," said Helen to herself, "if I know the meaning of words, and tones, and looks, and my dear simple-minded Margaret has been in the dark from the beginning."

"Still he has been your friend," she said, aloud, as sympathetically as she could contrive to speak. "Perhaps he has been kind in not revealing some secret of yours, which has come to his knowledge."

"What secret can he or any one else know?" cried Francesca, now roused to a feverish animation which Helen noted immediately.

"The secret which you refuse to explain to your father, Francesca," she said, looking steadfastly into the girl's face. As she went on with her gaze, Francesca's eyelids drooped slowly before it, and her lips quivered, but she did not utter a word.

"Is it not so?" Helen asked her, now

really interested in her trouble, and beginning to pity her with all her heart.

Francesca, however, still said nothing, but only sobbed, all her tears now dried up, with a violence that terrified Helen, unaccustomed to such storms of emotion. Calming herself at last, she looked into Helen's face with a piteous, timid expression that all but brought the tears into Helen's eyes themselves. All her hauteur vanished in a moment, and she put out her hand to Francesca, who seized it and kissed it passionately.

"Oh! forgive me," she said at length, "for heaven's sake forgive me! I have neither mother, nor sister, nor friend in the world."

"You forget your father," suggested Helen.

"I meant no woman to be my friend and care for me and help me."

"My cousin is all kindness itself, Francesca," replied Helen, "and she said you would not confide your trouble to her."

"To *her!*" echoed Francesca, turning her eyes away; "that indeed would be impossible."

"Here is another mystification," said Helen to herself. "The girl loves somebody. Rinaldo has found it out, and my sweet cousin is the last person to be trusted with the information. Here are three facts to begin with. The next thing is to account for this aversion towards the sympathetic Margaret. I see it clearly, it must be jealousy, but jealousy of whom? Surely the old mosaic-worker can't be making up to my charming cousin, and fancy that because she comes every day to see his daughter, she would marry *him*. No, that is too preposterous; besides, it has something to do with this Rinaldo, and how in the world can he know anything about Margaret's affairs? Well, let his knowledge wait to be accounted for. Now for another venture in the dark."

"My thoughts have been wandering," she

began; "I was remembering a long talk we were all having with some visitors who had lately been at Venice."

At the mention of Venice, Francesca showed signs of quickly roused interest.

"No, I forgot, it was only one of them who had been there this autumn," continued Helen, while Francesca's efforts to assume an indifference to what was coming were less and less successful.

"It was our friend the sculptor, who brought some more of his drawings to show my cousin, who draws admirably herself. And, by-the-bye, Francesca, how very ill you are using Signor D'Urbino about his work," she added, and again looked significantly at the poor girl, who trembled more than ever beneath the examination. "I see it! I see it all now!" thought Helen. "And what fools we have all been! Is the man a villain, I wonder? or is Francesca her own worst enemy? Yes! I see it plainly enough. She loves that fellow, D'Urbino, and she

fancies that he is paying attention to my fair cousin. Impudent fellow, if he is! but I acquit him of that folly. Now to find out whether the man has been playing with this poor child's feelings, or whether it is only her own unlucky folly."

"Francesca," she began, "what will you say to me if I tell you that I have guessed your secret?"

"You have not guessed it, Miss Sandford," replied Francesca, recurring to her angry mood. "Why do you come here to mock me? What right have you to say that I have any secret at all?"

"My dear child," replied Helen, tenderly, "you are miserable, and you talk at random. Listen to me, I beg you calmly, only for one moment. Supposing that I really have guessed something which no one knows, what would you wish me to do?"

"You cannot have guessed it," retorted Francesca. "It is impossible."

"Would you mind my telling you what

I think?" Helen continued, taking no notice of Francesca's indignation. "It is only to say a few words, and then I shall know what to say to other people if they ask me."

"Why cannot they let me alone?" cried Francesca, refusing to listen to Helen's reasoning. "I am nobody to the people that belong to you."

"You are not nobody to us, Francesca," replied Helen, quite surprised at her own forbearance. "You may think so, but it is not true. My cousin has felt an interest in you since the day she first saw you, and now it would really give me sincere pleasure to be of service to you. What I want you to see is this: that if only you will tell me whether I am right or wrong, I shall know when to hold my tongue and what to say, in case people should talk about you. My belief is, that you have got hold of some notion that is totally false; and if you will trust me, I think I can set everything right."

"Everything!" repeated Francesca, "that *is* impossible."

"Well, not everything," replied Helen; "but everything in which my cousin is concerned. Would not that be some little satisfaction to you?"

"Perhaps it would," said Francesca.

"May I tell you, then?" asked Helen. "You do not speak, Francesca," she went on, as Francesca said nothing.

"If you do not actually forbid me, I shall tell you."

Francesca turned away her head, but still kept silence.

"You love Signor D'Urbino," said Helen, almost in a whisper.

Francesca made no reply, but the violent flush upon her countenance told her tale.

"And you think he is paying attention to my cousin," Helen continued. "Is it not so?"

Francesca burst into tears, and wept unrestrainedly, but made no other reply.

Helen let her cry on, and by degrees she was clearly relieved. At last she said, as plainly as her sobbing allowed,—

"I could not help it. There is nothing for me but to die."

"Believe me, Francesca," Helen answered, "I will never betray you; but for the sake of us all, you must satisfy me on one point. Has Signor D'Urbino ever said anything to make you love him?"

"Nothing! nothing!" cried Francesca, eagerly; "except that he is so good, and so kind, and so accomplished, and so far above me. Even when he teases me, it makes me love him all the more."

"But does he care for you, do you think? or did he ever care for you?" asked Helen, still doubting as to the clever sculptor's honour.

"Never," exclaimed Francesca, zealous even in the midst of her sorrow for the character of the man she was so foolish as to love so wildly. "He never cared for me,

except as part of the furniture of his studio. Except, perhaps, that sometimes he seemed to like to talk to me; but it was all delusion—I see it well enough. You know I am an ignorant girl; and he could not care to make a companion of me. And he is so clever, and so pleasant, and knows so much, that any woman might come to love him, without his trying to make her care for him."

At these last words a most unwelcome thought shot across Helen's mind. What if Margaret should be a victim to the unconscious fascinations of this formidable cavaliere? Just at the very moment, too, when she had convinced herself that Della Porta was beginning to understand Margaret better, and was only waiting for a little encouragement to broach the subject to Mrs. Sandford. That Margaret could be romantic enough to prefer a brilliant artist and talker, unconnected by any lineage with the proud aristocracy of his country, to a

wealthy marquis, even when that marquis was a man of unquestionable good sense and temper, Helen in her heart believed. D'Urbino, too, was a strong liberal in politics; and Margaret imagined herself to be an equally strong and liberal politician. This would, indeed, be an upsetting of all her plans and expectations; and she was so annoyed at the mere thought that the change in her looks and manner struck Francesca, in the midst of all her own excitement.

"You are not angry with me, Miss Sandford," she said, "I hope. I could not help saying what I thought. And I dare say you must have thought the same yourself; for he has been so often with you of late."

"How do you know that, Francesca?" replied Helen, remembering the unpleasant fact, but unprepared for being reminded of it at the moment.

"I have seen him go to you every day,"

replied Francesca, again almost losing her self-control. "And he stays so long. It must have been very pleasant to you all to see him and listen to him," she added, not exactly enviously, but humbly, as if the happiness were too great for one like herself.

"You are mistaken, Francesca," said Helen. "Rely upon it you are mistaken."

"Miss Osborne talked about him yesterday, and I saw how pleased she had been," replied Francesca.

"Did she?" said Helen. "But, no!" she added, speaking to herself, "that is rather a proof that she cares nothing for him, at least at present. Yet she is just the girl to begin with liking, and go on to loving. If she ever does love any man, she will found her love upon a respect for him, with all her romantic theories."

It was not the time, however, for indulging in reveries, especially with Francesca now wondering and watching her. There

were more inquiries also to be made, before any action could be taken in her fresh perplexities. So throwing aside her fears, she began again upon Francesca's affairs.

"Now I understand so far," she began, "I can set your mind at rest on one thing. Signor D'Urbino is doing nothing to attract the affections of my cousin. He seems to have very few acquaintances, and he is much at home with the gentlemen he meets at our house. The only thing that puts him out, and the annoyance is evidently great, is the impossibility of finishing his beloved Italy, through your refusal to sit to him again."

"I am very, very sorry," sobbed the poor girl, "but I cannot go any more. Ought I to go, Miss Sandford, now I know the misery I have brought on myself?"

"Undoubtedly not!" said Helen, in so positive a tone that Francesca was startled. "On no consideration must you ever enter his house again."

"Yet it was so pleasant while it lasted," said Francesca, "and now—now—it is done for ever. Let me die! let me die, and be forgotten."

"And leave your father to an utter loneliness?" replied Helen. "You cannot mean anything so wicked."

"I had forgotten that," murmured Francesca; "but my senses are going fast. It is useless to try any more."

"Do you mean ever to tell your father, Francesca?" asked Helen.

"If he presses me hard, it must be done," said Francesca, "but it will cut him to the heart."

"We will talk about that some other day," replied Helen. "Perhaps I can smooth matters a little for you. What I want you to tell me before I leave you, is about this wretched man, Rinaldo, and about your conduct on the day you were missing for so many hours. You have trusted me with so much, that you may as well trust

me with a little more. What can have been his possible object in coming to see your father? It must have had something to do with you—of that you seem to have no doubt yourself."

"I may as well tell you everything, indeed," said Francesca, after some little hesitation. "It was only one more act of frenzy."

And then she told Helen the whole history of the unfortunate day, again and again repeating her conviction that Rinaldo had fathomed her secret, and that he interpreted her long delay outside the police-station, and her incautious questions about D'Urbino, as signs of her uncontrollable love.

"And how could I bear to tell such a story to my father, Miss Sandford?" she asked, as Helen listened to the tale with sympathising eyes. "I know what his proud spirit expects from me, and the shameless want of self-respect and of obedience to him

that he will see in everything I have been doing."

"It is a sad affair altogether, my poor child," replied Helen, "but if you will allow it, I will go to your father myself, and tell him you have explained everything to me, and that he may take my word that you have done nothing really wrong. This would also give me an opportunity for finding out whether Signor Rinaldo's business with him had anything to do with you. You may trust me for saying nothing that can possibly compromise you in any way, and I am really anxious on my own account to prevent any more mischief happening."

"Perhaps it will be better," said Francesca, after a little thought. "Oh!" she added, "how kind you are to me!"

"Understand this, then, Francesca," continued Helen, "that if I learn that Rinaldo has betrayed your secret to your father, I will come back to you at once, and let you

know. But if I leave the house without seeing you, you may be at ease on that point. I have stayed too long already, and must put off what else I have to say till another opportunity."

CHAPTER III.

MRS. SANDFORD'S EVENING PARTY.

"YOUR daughter seems to recover her health rather slowly," observed Helen to the mosaic-worker, after politely greeting him, in the room where she found him at his usual occupation.

"Too slowly, indeed, Signorina," said Giorgione, "I am more anxious than I like to own even to myself."

"Perhaps," said Helen, "if you will not think me impertinent in what I want to say, she has been a good deal distressed at not being able to describe to you the little accidents that kept her from home that day

she went with us to that unlucky preaching in the Coliseum."

Giorgione bowed formally as she said this, and assured her in a rather stately manner, that nothing that the Signorina could say could be otherwise than agreeable to him. A little surprised at the dignified reception with which she was met, Helen stifled her rising inclination to be annoyed.

"We have been rather anxious about her ourselves," she continued, "as it was partly our fault that she was placed in rather difficult circumstances."

Giorgione bowed again with the same lofty air.

"My cousin and I also thought that she was a little too much excited when she went with us to see the procession which ended in the escape of the man Donato," continued Helen.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Giorgione, at once dropping his stately manner. "She never told me that. I knew she had been with

you, and that the scoundrel had escaped the gallows; but I had not the remotest idea that she had felt the slightest interest in the matter."

"It was no doubt nothing but excitement, from her not being quite strong again. And after all, it was only because she thought the man who was rescued was to be executed without deserving death. She said something about his being a victim of the cruelty of the government."

"The man is a villain of the deepest dye, Miss Sandford," replied Giorgione. "And if anything short of murder deserves to be punished with death, it is deserved in his case."

"You amaze me!" replied Helen. "From your daughter's account, we imagined that the man's real crime was his holding the same liberal opinions that you yourself hold."

"Francesca is in absolute ignorance of the man's history," said Giorgione; "of that I can assure you."

"And now about her absence on the other occasion. You know that girls will sometimes make confidants of comparative strangers of their own sex, in little matters of which they would rather not speak to their fathers and brothers."

"I know it only too well," replied Giorgione.

"You will not then be angry with your daughter, if I say that she has confided to me the history of the little mistakes which led to the absence which so justly surprised you, and of which she has given you no explanation as yet."

The kind and almost deferential manner in which Helen felt her way in her somewhat delicate task, disarmed Giorgione at once. But he was at a loss to account for this sudden interest in his child's affairs in a young lady to whom he had hitherto attributed no slight hauteur.

"My daughter is honoured by your kind attention," he replied, deliberately.

"May I add," continued Helen, "that I am convinced that there was nothing whatever that was wrong in her actions, and that so far from tending to alienate the regards of myself and my cousin, her account of herself has only increased my interest in her happiness."

"You will forgive me, Miss Sandford," returned Giorgione, "if I confess that I am taken so completely by surprise in this announcement that I hardly know how I feel about it. We are strangers to one another, and I have lived so long in this unfortunate city, that I have come to suspect everybody's motives in every action, until it is thoroughly accounted for."

"You mistrust mine?" asked Helen, a little mortified.

"Not in the least, Signorina," said Giorgione, growing more grave, but not more distant in his manner. "But you must see, yourself, that this is not the whole explanation of what has taken place. There is

something serious which my daughter wishes to be concealed from me—"

"Only for the present!" interrupted Helen, eagerly.

"Be it so," continued Giorgione. "Nevertheless, it is clear to me that there is something seriously wrong—"

"Not morally wrong," interposed Helen.

"That I fully understand," replied Giorgione. "What I was going to say is this, that were it only some trifling misadventure which is at the bottom of these annoyances, you yourself would not be led to interest yourself so anxiously in my daughter's affairs. I am not blaming you for it, I pray you to observe; on the contrary, I believe that I am profoundly thankful to you; and I am confident that my daughter has received none but sound and healthy advice from you and Miss Osborne; and I will prove my trust by now accepting your assurances. Only do not do me and yourself the injustice of pretending that there is

nothing but some trifling accident or girlish nonsense at the bottom of it all."

"There is nothing that she really need be ashamed of, I assure you," said Helen, more anxious to propitiate Giorgione, the more he treated her rather as his inferior than as his superior.

"You try to weigh your words well, Signorina," rejoined he, "and I like you none the worse for it. You say that there is nothing that she *need be* ashamed of. Does not that imply that there is something she *is* ashamed of?"

"She is a woman, Signor Giorgione," replied Helen, ready to cry with vexation and pity for Francesca.

"And I am only a man, you wish to add," said Giorgione. "It is true; but I am also a father."

"We will hope that whatever obstacles there may be to her taking you into her complete confidence will some day, perhaps soon, pass away."

"We will hope so," replied he, "and in the meantime, she need not trouble herself any more about the finishing of that figure for which she has been sitting to Cavaliere D'Urbino, which seems to be weighing on her mind. I had a message from him to say that he can complete the head without her help."

"I had understood that Signor D'Urbino was a good deal annoyed about that same head," remarked Helen.

"He sends me word that he is going to begin on a new portrait bust which will take up all his time—in fact, a portrait of the person who brought me his message, and who is the last man I should have expected to go to him. I think you are acquainted with Signor D'Urbino yourself; and you might take some opportunity of asking him if he is acquainted with the position and character of the Cameriere Rinaldo."

Helen's heart beat fast, as she heard the name that she was vainly striving to introduce into the conversation.

"I have met the Cameriere in society," she replied, afraid to trust herself to say more.

"He came here to talk to me about some order for mosaic work, and just gave me the message from Signor D'Urbino as he was going away. I fancied that the order for the mosaics was only a feint, and that he came for the sole purpose of giving the message. But why Signor D'Urbino could not have sent a note, or called himself, I cannot understand. And when Signor Rinaldo had delivered the message, which, by the bye, I have not yet given to Francesca, with inquiries about her health, I could not make out why he went on advising me to send her into the country for change of air and scene. I know that I am prejudiced against the man, and may do him injustice; but I confess I thought him a little intrusive with his suggestions. The advice, however, is worth thinking of, from whatever quarter it comes."

"I will not fail to give the hint you suggest," returned Helen, and they parted with mutual expressions of obligation.

"Poor Francesca!" she thought, as she quickly sought her own room, before presenting herself to be catechised by the eager Margaret. "I need not tell her this. She is miserable enough without the additional worry of knowing that for some reason or other this horrible man is plotting to prevent her seeing Signor D'Urbino again. And that father of hers! what a fine old fellow he is, though he did administer so very decided a snubbing to me. I suppose it is because of his country that he is so much like a gentleman, and took me down so quietly and yet so irresistibly. As for Francesca, she says she is an ignorant girl, and she worships this sculptor of hers as if he were the incarnation of all knowledge and wisdom. But where is the great difference between the two? Well, if pride goes before a fall, some reward ought to

attend humility; but what reward, I wonder, attends me for my humiliation before this proud old fellow and his love-stricken daughter? Nevertheless, I don't want my pretty cousin to fall in love with the fascinating sculptor by any means. And now for the cross-examination."

And she entered her mother's drawing-room with a forced pretence at seeming simply bored and tired.

"At last," exclaimed Margaret, as soon as she caught sight of her cousin. "We thought you must at least have been sitting for your portrait in mosaic."

Helen laughed, and replied that she had really been paying a visit to Francesca's father, whom she found a more polished personage than she had expected.

"But Helen, my dear," said her mother, "will it not look rather strange if you pay such long visits in this way, and to such people too?"

"I assure you, mamma," rejoined Helen,

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"you will find this Giorgione a very dignified old gentleman, and quite worth talking to now and then. You will hardly believe it, perhaps, but I came away with a feeling that he considered it quite a condescension to honour me with his conversation. And really he was extremely good-natured about it."

"My dear, you quite mystify me," replied Mrs. Sandford; "in what way should this very worthy person show good-nature to you?"

"Oh! there is nothing very particular, mamma," said Helen, "only it was a little cool in me to ask him to take my word for it that his daughter was not really to be blamed for her absence on that day that she went with us to hear the preaching Capuchin. Many persons would have been affronted."

"And this person was so kind as not to be affronted," said Mrs. Sandford. "Well, my dear, you always will have your own

way, but this is the first time I ever knew you go against your professions about the bad effects of mixing up the different classes of society together."

"I have not forgotten it at all, mamma," rejoined Helen; "there is no forgetfulness of the distinctions of rank in helping a poor girl out of her difficulties."

"As you please, my dear," replied her mother; "but you have spent a long time in helping her. And if you had been affronted by her father for meddling in her affairs, you would have had only yourself to thank for it. But you are a wilful child, Helen, and always will be."

All this time, though Margaret had said nothing, Helen felt that her cousin's eyes were fixed upon her in surprise and perplexity. And the moment that Mrs. Sandford left the room, she was prepared for her cousin's sudden question.

"What is it, Helen?" Margaret exclaimed, eagerly. "There is something

that is not right. I see it in your face and in every word you have spoken. Has Francesca confessed?"

"She has," said Helen, "and I believe her father is satisfied with my assurance."

"Why should she tell me nothing?" asked Margaret.

"There has been a great mistake, and I think it is natural to her to feel as she did."

"May I hear the story from you?" asked Margaret.

"Not at present, certainly," replied Helen; "but there is nothing we need worry ourselves about, as far as I can see. You must send her a kind message by me to-morrow."

"Helen!" exclaimed Margaret, "I never was more perplexed in my life at your proceedings. Are you, too, going to join the band of the mystifying and solemn? You have always treated these people rather in the *de haut en bas* style, and now you come

back, and confess to have been patronised by the father, and seem rather to enjoy it than otherwise."

"I certainly have modified one or two of my opinions about them," said Helen.

"Modified!" repeated Margaret; "that is a mild word for the operation. But now about this Cameriere Rinaldo: have you found out anything concerning him? Was his visit to Francesca, or not?"

"It was not *to* her," said Helen.

"You are turning casuistical, Helen," replied Margaret; "is it part of your new character? If the visit was not *to* her, was it about her?"

"It was, and it was not," said Helen. "I am under no obligation to secresy about this same visit, so I have no need of being casuistical, as you call it. Francesca's father has told me what the man came for, and I confess I don't like the look of things at all."

"What conceivable aim can that wretched

man have in view?" exclaimed Margaret, when Helen had related Giorgione's account of the interview. And a repetition of the same question was the burden of the discussion which the two cousins continued at intervals throughout the day.

In the evening Mrs. Sandford had a reception of her friends and acquaintances, English and Roman. Not being a woman of keen feelings, and happy in an almost imperturbable temper, she was again in her usual spirits; but the company generally were less lively than was their wont, and all Helen's and Margaret's efforts to appear naturally cheerful failed to make the evening a success. Either people did not talk, or for the most part they talked in little knots of twos and threes; or if they sang or played, it was without animation or interest, and so gave no pleasure either to themselves or to their listeners. Just after one of the noisiest songs, Helen, who was sitting by herself in a sort of alcove, made

room upon her sofa for Evelyn, who was standing not far off, and pretending to applaud the singer.

"Sit down, Mr. Evelyn," she said, "and make yourself pleasant to me. I have not heard an agreeable word this evening. Nobody has flattered me, and nobody has contradicted me; and as a last resort, I come to you."

"For the flattery, or the contradiction?" asked Evelyn, with a smile, as he obeyed her command.

"Whichever you please," said Helen; "if you flatter me, it will be soothing to my vanity, but I shall know you don't mean what you say; whereas if you contradict me, I shall at least be sure that you are sincere."

"Is it impossible, then, that I should be sincere in praise, and insincere in argument?" he asked. "Is that your conclusion from your past experience?"

"Is it not the way with most men in their conversation with women?"

"There are exceptions, surely," said Evelyn.

"There are," she said, "but now tell me, what has made you so unentertaining for some days past? Have you been wandering among the ruined temples all over Rome, seeking in vain for the remains of a temple to Epicurus, that you might revive the visible worship of the god in your own proper person."

"Bravo! Miss Sandford," cried Evelyn, with a genuine laugh. "Pray tell me when Epicurus was canonised, or deified, that I may set about compiling a book of appropriate devotions in honour of that excellent philosopher."

"Philosopher!" exclaimed Helen. "I thought he was a god."

"He ought to have been," said Evelyn, in his old paradoxical manner. "It is one of the most suggestive proofs of the defec-

tive nature of the old mythologies, that they had no special deity to personify the delights of doing nothing."

"But it strikes me that you have been lately rather remiss in exhibiting that delightfulness in your own person, Mr. Evelyn," replied Helen. "You have been doing nothing most strenuously, and yet do not seem to have found it a very exhilarating occupation."

"I will turn over a new leaf without delay," replied Evelyn. "What would you suggest as my first duty in order to promote the worship of your newly invented divinity?"

"Suppose you give an order to our friend Cavaliere D'Urbino for a statue of the god Epicurus," said Helen, "and sit to him yourself as the model. There would be a great work indeed, and one which would give you no trouble whatsoever."

"May all the gods in Olympus forbid it," cried Evelyn.

"What! don't you like the idea?" said Helen, "or don't you like the sculptor? Look at him over there, talking to my cousin and to your friend the Marchese. Margaret seems to think him an intelligent and interesting man."

It was a random saying on Helen's part, and an unconscious expression of a thought that crossed her mind at the moment, rather than a direct question to Evelyn himself. To her surprise, he took the question seriously, and looked steadily for some moments at Margaret and D'Urbino before he replied.

"Have you known Cavaliere D'Urbino long?" he at last asked her.

"Only this winter," rejoined Helen, and seeing Evelyn no longer in the mood for banter, she went on, in another strain. "But you need not receive the proposition with so grave a countenance, Mr. Evelyn. I can set your mind at rest. Signor D'Urbino is now engaged on the portrait of a personage of doubtful repute in Rome."

Evelyn turned so sharply to her, and with so curious an expression in his eyes, that she blushed and hesitated before she continued,

"I mean the Cameriere Rinaldo."

"Oh! is that all?" asked Evelyn, in the voice of a man relieved from an unpleasant suspicion.

"Do you think it nothing?" asked Helen, in her turn astonished.

"How do you know that such is the fact?" said Evelyn, without answering her question.

"I heard it from the mosaic-worker Giorgione, who received the information from the man himself," said Helen. "Indeed, were it not for your protestations against being bored with other people's affairs, I should like to ask you what you think of something that Giorgione mentioned about this same Signor Rinaldo."

"I will prepare for my more consistent worship of your last created divinity," re-

joined Evelyn, "by one final act of folly in taking an interest in the affair, just as confirmed drunkards indulge in one more grand bout of drinking before taking the pledge for ever."

"You make me laugh, in spite of myself," returned Helen, "but really I am annoyed and uncomfortable."

"Ah! Miss Sandford," interrupted Evelyn, "you will never be canonised as a worshipper of the idol you have raised for my benefit."

"I am convinced," continued Helen, "that this Rinaldo has some scheme in his head for getting that poor girl Francesca out of Rome, and with a special desire to prevent her from seeing Signor D'Urbino."

"Why should she not see him?" asked Evelyn.

"Well, I think it is as well that those sittings should come to an end. But the difficulty is to guess why Rinaldo should be so anxious for it."

Evelyn's countenance grew serious enough, as Helen said this to him; and it grew still more serious as his eye wandered again to the group of men standing round Margaret.

"Miss Osborne seems to find my friend Della Porta very interesting this evening," he observed, without taking notice of what Helen said.

"He himself seems to throw a more than usual *empressement* into his manner towards her, to-night," replied Helen. "You knew him long ago, I think. Is it impertinent in me if I ask whether he was always the same well conducted and amiable man that he now seems to be?"

"Yes, to be sure he was," said Evelyn, turning quickly round again. "But why do you smile, Miss Sandford—surely you don't imagine that—that—"

"Go on, Mr. Evelyn," said Helen, as he still hesitated.

"That Della Porta thinks of your cousin

as more than a friendly acquaintance," replied Evelyn.

"I thought you had observed the growth of his feelings with gratification," said Helen.

"Good Heavens!" cried Evelyn, "never! not for a single moment. I suppose you will next imagine that I should like to see her captivated by the fascinations of that audacious fellow, D'Urbino, who seems to be now coming this way?"

D'Urbino, however, turned aside and found companionship elsewhere; and after one or two abortive attempts, Helen succeeded in recalling Evelyn's attention to the proceedings of Rinaldo in connection with Francesca.

"You really don't mean to imply that D'Urbino has struck up an alliance with that double-faced renegade," said Evelyn, with so much genuine feeling that Helen was tempted to say more than she had originally intended.

"I cannot say as much as that," she replied.

"If it is so," said Evelyn, "D'Urbino is really the scoundrel I thought him to be."

"He seems to be a man with considerable powers of attracting interest and regard," observed Helen. "Perhaps Signor Rinaldo is fascinated, as others might be."

Helen had hardly uttered the words when she longed to recal them.

"You mean more than you say," rejoined Evelyn, "I see it as plainly as if you had told me. For God's sake tell me what you mean."

He looked so distressed that Helen was fairly frightened.

"I only said that others might find him fascinating; that is all," she replied, supremely uncomfortable and angry with herself.

"Rinaldo might, and others also might," replied Evelyn. "Believe me, I don't un-

derstand you. Who are the others? It is all hypothesis together. If 'others' mean nobody, why should you attribute this singular power of attracting people to Signor D'Urbino?"

"You expect too much accuracy of language," rejoined Helen, with a feeble attempt at jesting. "You know you often say that women speak incorrectly because they think inaccurately."

"Not all women," replied Evelyn, determined not to be baffled. "I am going to say an extremely bold thing; you will think it perhaps an extremely rude thing; but for the sake of the happiness of more than one person, I must ask you if you have any reason for believing that any woman has already found the attractiveness of this Signor D'Urbino not conducive to her happiness?"

"It is a question which you have no right to ask," rejoined Helen, "and I cannot answer it in any way whatsoever."

"Are you under an engagement not to mention any suspicions you may entertain?" said Evelyn.

"I have no such suspicions, Mr. Evelyn," she replied.

"But you may have something more than suspicions," he retorted.

"We will drop the subject, if you please," rejoined Helen. "We have sat here by ourselves so long that mischief will be made of it by somebody."

And smiling brightly as she shot this Parthian dart at the discomfited Evelyn she walked up to the subject of their discussion.

"I have not had time for a moment's talk, Cavaliere," she said to D'Urbino, holding out her hand to him.

Evelyn watched the proceeding from his solitude in the alcove. "Most women have no character at all," he muttered to himself. "Is this an illustration of the truth of the old cynic's saying, or is it just the reverse?"

And he found his way to the side of Margaret Osborne as quickly as he could without being observed, and there he sat for the remainder of the evening.

CHAPTER IV.

IN D'URBINO'S STUDIO.

D'URBINO's bust of Cameriere Rinaldo proceeded but slowly. It was with no little reluctance that he had originally undertaken the work, through his disinclination to come into contact with Rinaldo more than he could avoid. It was not only that it was unpleasant to him to be visited almost daily by a personage who was in such ill odour with the political party of which he was a sincere, if not a blind adherent. The belief that Rinaldo had laid him under personal obligations by rendering him an important service on more than one occasion, when he

was in serious peril, was distasteful to him in the extreme. He felt as if he were being gradually entangled in some invisible net, from which there might be no escape when the hour of catastrophe arrived.

That Rinaldo had some secret object in view in forcing himself upon him, though in the most friendly way, he was as convinced as if Rinaldo's whole mind lay unveiled before him. To a man, like himself, not yet thirty years old, ardent in his nature, irritated by the social and ecclesiastical despotism under which he lived, and with no definite aim in life on which to expend the whole energies of his character, few things could be more annoying than the consciousness that he was an object of special interest in the eyes of a man to whom rumour attributed such odious occupations.

Nor did these uncomfortable sensations wear off as Rinaldo's sittings for the portrait were continued. It was soon clear that Rinaldo took a vast deal more interest in the

sculptor himself than in his work. At times he said but little, and his pre-occupation was quite annoying to D'Urbino, who could not endure the task of modelling features that seemed bereft of all life and motion. Then, again, when the progress of the work happened to require his sitter to look him full in the face, there was an expression in Rinaldo's eyes which quite bewildered the sensitive D'Urbino. It was keen, penetrating, melancholy, but not unkind or suspicious. Whether it was himself who was the subject of Rinaldo's meditation and investigation, or whether his thoughts were far away, it was impossible altogether to misread their character.

As to his own personal sensations towards his incomprehensible visitor, they were all in confusion. At one moment he was conscious of being drawn to him with something like an affectionate regard. Then again he was repelled and disgusted with himself for his weakness in yielding to the arts of a

double-dealer. Was Rinaldo, too, really a double-dealer? The nature of his work requiring him to study the grave and strange countenance before him from all points of view, D'Urbino had every opportunity for detecting any unconscious revelations of sinister purposes to which Rinaldo's features might lend themselves. Surely, he thought, a man cannot go on in this way day after day, and never betray the faintest signs of the duplicity of his character, if he is actually the scoundrel that he is supposed to be.

But no such signs appeared. Either Rinaldo was a more consummate actor than D'Urbino believed it possible even for an Italian to become, or there was a fundamental honesty of purpose underlying all this incomprehensible conduct. In the midst of this continual change of expression and intensely reserved thoughtfulness, the open brow, the clear straightforward look of the eyes, and the absence of any angry tension of the lips, combined to

assure D'Urbino that whatever were Rinaldo's faults or criminality, the riddle of his character was not to be expounded by simply attributing to him profound deception or systematic villainy.

Every now and then D'Urbino fancied that he detected a certain look of weakness in the whole countenance, though the existence of such an element in such a person seemed impossible. Yet his constant studies of the human face, carried on with a view to success in his art, had given D'Urbino a very positive confidence in his own interpretations of the changing looks of the features of both men and women. If he had known how utterly he had misconceived the expression of poor Francesca's countenance, his vanity would have received a severe shock, and he would have hesitated to trust his theories about Rinaldo even to the extent which they deserved to be trusted. As it was, he was conscious of a decided sense of relief when he came to attribute to this for-

midable government official a share in the weakness of ordinary minds, and with all the dogmatic self-reliance of his age and scanty experience, he came to the conclusion that if Rinaldo meant mischief, he himself was more than a match for him.

"Yes," observed Rinaldo, replying to a chance remark of D'Urbino's, one morning when he was not in one of his silent moods, "Naples is not a very interesting place to strangers, but perhaps people who live long there find it otherwise."

"That I cannot say," replied D'Urbino. "Though I was born there, we left it very young, and the only things I cared to see when chance has taken me there since, were the Museum and Pompeii."

"I fancied you had a good many relations there," said Rinaldo.

"Indeed?" replied D'Urbino; "what makes you think so?"

"I have heard there are many families of your name in Naples," said Rinaldo.

"It is very possible," rejoined D'Urbino, "but I don't think they can be relations of mine. We have no relations that I know of. My father and mother died while we were yet children, and as we grew up we lost sight of the past altogether."

"And have you never felt your interest in it revive?" asked Rinaldo.

"I can't say that I have," replied D'Urbino. "I do not even know in what part of Naples I was born, or even if it is not a mistake to suppose that I was born in Naples at all."

"Is it really possible?" said Rinaldo.

"Who could care to live in a country that is ruled by a Bourbon?" replied D'Urbino, bitterly.

"And yet you live in Rome, which is ruled by a sovereign as despotic as the rulers of Naples," rejoined Rinaldo.

"In Rome I find a thousand things to remind me of the free and glorious past,"

replied D'Urbino. "In Naples there is nothing but the tyrannical present."

"But your sister, Cavaliere," rejoined Rinaldo; "has she no friends or acquaintances in her birth-place?"

"Bianca is only my half-sister," said D'Urbino: "we had the same father, but different mothers."

"Bianca!" thought Rinaldo. "Is it possible? Yet it *is* possible, and I may have been under a wretched delusion all the while."

While he pondered, it suddenly struck D'Urbino that these questions were being put with some special purpose, and were not the mere result of unmeaning curiosity.

"But why do you ask?" he said, as Rinaldo still remained silent.

"I was dreaming of the past," replied Rinaldo. "You forget the past, my friend; or, rather, you have no past that you care for. For myself, I live in the past, so far as I live at all."

D'Urbino fixed a long, piercing gaze at the incomprehensible man before him, before he replied.

"In the past only, Signor Cameriere?"

"In the past only, though sometimes for a few moments in a possible future," said Rinaldo.

And for a time both men relapsed into silence, and the modelling advanced a little way. At length Rinaldo began again.

"That is a striking head, Cavaliere," he said. "You were fortunate in finding so handsome a girl as Giorgione's daughter to sit to you."

"She is an interesting girl," replied D'Urbino, "and I really liked her extremely. Of course you gave my message about her not coming again. I fancied it would have the effect of bringing her back again, after her preposterous perverseness in deserting me just when she promised to be of more use than ever."

"Was *that* your real reason for sending

the message?" asked Rinaldo, for the moment forgetting to conceal his surprise.

"Why, what interest can you feel in the matter, Signor Rinaldo? Surely Francesca Giorgione is nothing in the world to you."

"Oh, no! nothing in the world," replied Rinaldo.

"Yes, I forgot for the moment," exclaimed D'Urbino; "I forgot her father's politics. Of course, a Giorgione, whether a man or woman, is obnoxious to the Cameriere Giovanni Rinaldo."

"I understand the sarcasm, D'Urbino," rejoined Rinaldo, not angrily, but sadly. "God knows it is not her father's politics that prepossesses me against that girl. And what a face she has, even in the lifeless clay! It is just one of those faces that one fancies one has seen before, but whether in dreams or as living realities one cannot tell. I suppose it is from my habit of calling up past hopes and past sorrows, that I see in portraits and in living people suggestions

that I can neither account for nor yet get rid of. That girl is nothing to me. But as I sit here and look at that head almost every day, I cannot help sometimes wishing that the original were not Giorgione's child."

"You perfectly amaze me!" cried D'Urbino. "What calumny have you got hold of about that unlucky man? Of course he is no friend to you and to those whom you serve; but I thought you could distinguish between liberalism and rascality."

"Indeed I can," rejoined Rinaldo, quite apologetically, D'Urbino thought.

"And yet you dare to insinuate that Giorgione is a scoundrel," said D'Urbino, indignantly.

"I insinuate nothing," said Rinaldo.

"Then what is it to you that a girl, who happens to suit me in the prosecution of my profession, has this or that man for her father?"

Thrown off his balance by the vehemence with which D'Urbino resented his implied

imputations, Rinaldo, for the first time since he had become a papal official, fairly lost his outward self-control, covered his eyes with his hands, and only murmured "You are right; it is no concern of mine; I beg your pardon for the interference. Yet," he went on, in a reproachful but anxious tone, "if you knew all—and yet it may be a blunder of my own."

"Signor Rinaldo," replied D'Urbino, on the point of breaking into a towering passion, and dashing his modelling tools on the floor; "this is simply outrageous. Though you are old enough to be my father——"

"I am, indeed," interrupted Rinaldo, with a look that made D'Urbino pause in his wrath.

"Well," he continued, "whatever your age, and whoever you are, and that is a thing which nobody can tell, it is unpardonable that you should abuse my consent to receive you here, to vilify an honourable,

though a poor man, and interfere, besides, in my private affairs."

"God forgive me, D'Urbino!" replied Rinaldo. "I am old and lonely in the world."

"And is that a reason why you should blacken other men's characters?" asked D'Urbino.

"I did not blacken them," pleaded Rinaldo.

"Then in the name of heaven," cried D'Urbino, "tell me what you mean. Do you know anything against Giorgione's daughter?"

"Nothing whatsoever," replied Rinaldo, "except—except——" and he hesitated to go on.

"Except what?" cried D'Urbino, savagely. "Speak out, man. This is no place for mysterious slanderings. You shall stab no man's or woman's reputation in my presence, if I can help it. Keep that pleasure for your secret gratification."

"Pleasure!" echoed Rinaldo. "Oh, my God! that I, of all living men, should be charged with enjoying the murder of a woman's reputation!"

"Of that I know nothing, Signor Rinaldo," rejoined D'Urbino, a little less fiercely. "But I insist upon your stating, without any sort of mystification, what you know against my poor friend Giorgione."

"I know him to have been at one time in secret communication with one of the blackest villains in all Italy; and I have every reason for believing that for some reason or other he is still in the power of that same villain."

"Who is this scoundrel?" asked D'Urbino, after a pause.

"The man who escaped hanging not very long ago, and in whose rescue it is said that you yourself took a prominent part."

"What, that miserable Donato?" cried D'Urbino. "Impossible! It is an atrocious calumny, Signor Rinaldo. And as to

the man himself, I did not help to rescue him; but I rejoiced at his being freed, because, though I believe him to be a worthless scamp, he was a victim to the tyranny that draws the life blood of this unhappy country."

"It is as I have said," replied Rinaldo.

"I will ask Giorgione himself about it before I sleep this night," rejoined D'Urbino.

"Then you will help in bringing about a calamity upon yourself, which you will mourn for as long as your life shall last," said the Cameriere.

"Signor Rinaldo," retorted D'Urbino furiously, "you are driving me wild with your insinuations. What is it to you, I ask again, whether Giorgione and this Donato have anything to do with one another, and whether I think well or ill about Giorgione, or about Donato himself? What are Donato's proceedings to me, that you should busy yourself about them?"

"More than you imagine, D'Urbino," replied Rinaldo.

"And you will explain nothing more?" said D'Urbino. "Why will you torment me with your bitter insinuations, and yet refuse to trust me fully?"

"I hope soon to trust you fully," said Rinaldo, "at present I dare not, for I am afraid that your impetuous anger and impatience would ruin everything."

"Ruin what?" cried D'Urbino, "are you mad, or only plotting some mischief to me?"

"God forbid!" ejaculated Rinaldo. "We will say no more about it to-day."

CHAPTER V.

PLANS AND COUNTERPLANS.

"TELL the messenger he need not wait. I will send an answer in the course of the afternoon."

So said Rinaldo, to his servant, a few days after his stormy discussion with D'Urbino, on receiving a note which he had briefly glanced at before thus dismissing its bearer. An hour afterwards he was still sitting with the note before him pondering on the thought it had suggested him, and unable to decide what he should do. Yet the note was simple enough and contained nothing which might not have

been read in the public streets. It was from Henry Noel; and ran thus:—

"I am off to Naples to-morrow, and shall be away for some months, having secured occupation in the shape of some work to be done in the royal library, and in carrying out a long-talked-of examination into the condition of the church registers, which are said to be in a very neglected condition. If there is anything I can do for you in Naples, pray let me know, as, though I have work to do, it will leave me a good deal of leisure time on my hands."

At length Rinaldo made up his mind on the thoughts and schemes that were troubling him.

"After all," he thought, "there is no reason in the world why I should hesitate. And moreover, I need tell him nothing, that will set him or anybody else thinking. Such enquiries are made again and again in the ordinary course of business arrangements, and in the establishing of the rights

of heirs and legatees. It is only this miserable indecision that haunts me and paralyses me still."

Accordingly, before the day was over, Noel received the following:—

"I am rejoiced to hear that you are going. The change of scene, and the change of occupation will do wonders for you. Thanks for your kind offer to execute any commissions for me. In the course of your examination of the Neapolitan church registers, I should be glad if you would make a memorandum, if you come across any register or notice of the marriage of a certain Bianca Gabrielli with a D'Urbino — Alessandro D'Urbino, I think; but of that I am not sure. The marriage must have taken place from five-and-twenty to five-and-thirty years ago; so there is a wide margin as to date. There are many families named D'Urbino in Naples, I fancy; but I am sorry to say I have not the slightest guide as to the parish where the marriage took place. I asked

D'Urbino, the clever young sculptor of the Via Felice, whether he knew any of the people of the same name in Naples, but he knows nothing of any of them. I am told, also, that the register of the said marriage has been stolen, and a person who is much interested in the matter is confident that it really was carried off. However, it is just possible that you may come across some informal notification of the marriage, or some old official who remembers something about it, and if so, it will be a work of kindness to note what you may discover. It seems such a wild-goose chase to hunt after a non-existing page of an old book through all the innumerable churches of Naples, that nobody would undertake the business for its own sake. But when I got your note this morning, it occurred to me that here was the very opportunity itself. And your good-natured offer tempts me to ask you to do what will really be a work of charity to a person in some trouble."

After another hour's meditation on what he had written, and after reading it three times over to make sure that the note conveyed exactly what it was intended to convey, and nothing more, Rinaldo despatched his letter, and so far as he found it possible, dismissed it from his mind for the rest of the day.

He would have found it still more difficult to quiet his thoughts, if he had been conscious of the subject under discussion that same afternoon, by the Sandford party and their friend Evelyn. For some reason, which Evelyn could hardly explain to himself, he was once more in his old humour, and could not resist an inclination to bewilder Mrs. Sandford with his paradoxes. He entered her drawing-room with his pretended languid air, and breathed what he considered a plaintive sigh, as he threw himself upon the most comfortable of the unoccupied sofas.

"I am delighted to see you so well

again, Mr. Evelyn," observed Helen, with a smile.

"So well again, Miss Sandford," he echoed. "What can be the ground for your congratulations?"

"That profound sigh with which you sought the repose you are now enjoying," said Helen. "Whenever you do not sigh or moan, I always know that you are not happy. It was almost a groan that you just uttered, and I therefore conclude that you are in admirable spirits, and find life really worth having."

"My dear Helen," interposed her matter-of-fact mother, "I don't understand you. But you remember her ways of old, Mr. Evelyn, I am sure."

"Miss Sandford was always unmerciful," replied Evelyn; "and as it happens, she is just now more cruelly unjust than usual. I assure you, Mrs. Sandford, I am the most unfortunate of men. You see before you a martyr to benevolence. I am still pursued

by a terrible destiny, to which the fate that tormented Orestes was a pleasant acquaintance. By-the-way, Miss Sandford, are you rather more up in the Latin mythology than you were a few nights ago?"

Helen laughed, and begged Evelyn to keep to his subject.

"What do you think, then, that I am going to undertake?" said Evelyn; "it is a fact that I propose to sit to that wild and most preposterously energetic young sculptor for my portrait in marble."

"And a very proper thing, too," observed Mrs. Sandford. "And it is very considerate of you, I think, to patronise so estimable a young man, Mr. Evelyn."

"But that's not the reason of my voluntary martyrdom, I must explain, or you will never do justice to my virtue. As to patronising that particularly magnificent young gentleman, I should as soon think of laying hold of a porcupine. I go to him in the service of distressed humanity, and not at all to please myself."

"And who is it?" asked Helen, "who has prevailed on you to sacrifice yourself in behalf of an oppressed damsel?"

"I did not say that it was for an oppressed damsel," rejoined Evelyn.

"But it *is* for one, nevertheless, Mr. Evelyn," replied Helen. "And I am perfectly well aware what your object is."

"Do you blame me?" asked Evelyn.

"Far from it," said Helen, "I am delighted to find you so ready in a good cause. Still, I am curious to know who prompted you to this heroic self-denial."

"That is *my* secret, Miss Sandford," replied he, laughing. "We all of us have our secrets, you are well aware."

As he said this, Helen chanced to turn towards Margaret, who had not as yet spoken a word, and from the stedfastness with which she went on with the embroidery on which she was employed, would have seemed to any ordinary observer to take little interest in the conversation. A slight quiver

on her lips, however, whether of pleasure or of shyness, as she heard Evelyn's last words, would have assured Helen that her cousin was anything but a heedless listener, even if such a thing could have been possible.

Quick as lightning in her conclusions, when the slightest cue was given to her, Helen instantly decided that Evelyn's bantering nonsense was the result of a wish to hide an earnest desire to gratify her cousin in anything that she seriously cared for. In the same spirit she interpreted the persistency with which Evelyn recurred to his *perslifage*, without giving her an opportunity for pressing him about his real reasons for undertaking what she well understood to be the defence of Francesca against the designs of Rinaldo.

"But, Mrs. Sandford," he went on, "to recur to the subject of my personal misfortunes. You agree with me, do not you, that it is a heavy misfortune to a man like myself, who comes to Rome, that refuge for

wise men of sense and indolence, with the sole intention of fulfilling the highest aim of human existence; and then to be seized on by an irresistible destiny, and turned into a parody of Don Quixote, to go about the world redressing the wrongs of the miserable of all denominations."

"I don't understand you, Mr. Evelyn," replied Mrs. Sandford. "Don Quixote, you know, was not a real person. How could you parody anyone who is all a fable?"

"Don Quixote not a real person!" exclaimed Evelyn, and Helen saw plainly that Margaret, with all her demureness, was enjoying his nonsense, and was feeling safe under its cover. "That is a mistake of us English people. If you go to Spain, you can see the very inn where he was knighted; and they show you the very blanket in which Sancho Panza was tossed. Do you know that a friend of mine was recommended to buy a donkey, on the ground that it was the lineal descendant of Sancho's

own jackass, and inherited all the merits of that inestimable quadruped?"

"But Mr. Evelyn," responded Mrs. Sandford, "I don't see what this has to do with your having your portrait carved. Surely you can't mean that you are going to be taken in the character of Don Quixote."

"Yes, that is exactly what I do mean," rejoined Evelyn, "if only I can persuade that pertinacious worshipper of the antique to adopt the idea."

"I suppose you mean Signor D'Urbino," said Mrs. Sandford; "of course it is his business to do whatever pleases his employers."

"Ah! my dear Mrs. Sandford," he rejoined, "you don't know that man. If you are at any time desirous of a lesson in practical humiliation, you have only to patronise him, and you will at once be satisfied beyond your utmost wishes."

"I shall send him no more cards, if this is what you think of him," replied Mrs. Sandford.

"For heaven's sake don't do anything of the kind," cried Evelyn. "You will ruin all my hopes. Besides, I like him, on the whole, immensely. You have no idea how much better I feel for the lesson he has taught me. I am sure we should all of us much regret losing the advantage of his society."

And he laid a special emphasis on "all of us," and glanced mischievously at Helen as he spoke.

"You are turned radical yourself, Mr. Evelyn," said Mrs. Sandford, rising to leave the room. "I believe that Margaret has corrupted you. I don't think it's safe to leave you together, but I have an engagement, and Helen will act as my representative. We shall see you to-night, of course, and I hope in an improved state of mind."

"Mr. Evelyn," said Helen, as soon as her mother had disappeared, "I am delighted. I thought you and D'Urbino were hardly

friends, and that you were the reverse of gratified at seeing him so much here."

"Well, well," said Evelyn, "*nous avons changé tout cela.*"

"Is '*nous*' to be translated 'we,' or does it simply stand for Mr. Charles Evelyn himself?" asked Helen, in her most jesting manner.

"Helen!" Margaret now broke in, "do you really think that there is some mischief brewing against this poor girl, which it is worth while to take some trouble to counteract?"

"I thought so from the day that her father was visited by this man Rinaldo," replied Helen. "But I don't quite see how this portrait scheme is to frustrate it."

"My notion, and your cousin's notion, too, is this," said Evelyn, "that if this man is in any way plotting to get her out of the way, he must have some serious personal interest in the matter. It is simply absurd to suppose that he can do it for any other

motive. Nor is it likely that his going to D'Urbino for his own portrait is anything else than a device for seeing the sculptor frequently, without attracting too much attention. Miss Sandford cannot, or will not, tell me all she knows; but I am convinced that this Rinaldo is in some way or other mixed up with the girl's troubles. Whether we ought to interfere, or should do any good if we did interfere, is a doubtful question. But there is no doubt that while we do know enough to cause much misgiving, we do not know enough to guide us to any practical action. And, lastly,—to end my long speech *en régle*,—the only way that I can think of for getting at such information as D'Urbino himself may possess, is in the familiar talk that goes on between an intelligent sculptor and the equally intelligent personage, the features of whose countenance he is transferring to clay."

"But it will be horribly tiresome work to you, I am afraid," replied Helen, Margaret

again busy on her embroidery and saying nothing.

"I shall undertake it with the sincerest pleasure, if you can believe me," said Evelyn.

"Under the circumstances I *can* believe you, Mr. Evelyn," replied Helen, with a glance at her cousin, and a smile so full of meaning, that Evelyn thought the safest course was to retreat from the field.

"And the Marchese, Margaret," said Helen, as soon as they were alone; "what about him?"

"What Marchese?" asked Margaret, with a pretence at not understanding her cousin's meaning.

"There is but one Marchese who is supposed to be interested in our affairs, my dear," replied Helen.

"In *our* affairs, if you please," said Margaret, "but not especially in *mine*."

"Are you serious, Margaret," continued Helen, "in continuing the pretence of believing that Marchese Della Porta has not

been contemplating making—well, how shall I express the proceedings of so very measured a personage?—has not contemplated entering into negotiations with a view to obtaining your hand; and if fortune is propitious, your heart also?"

"I am perfectly serious in saying that if such a suspicion ever crossed my mind," said Margaret, "it was only when you yourself suggested it; and it passed away the moment I asked myself whether it was anything but a baseless fancy of yours."

"One more question, my dear, and I will release you from further questioning," said Helen. "No," she continued, after some hesitation, "it is a question I have no right to ask you, long and unbroken as our affection has been."

"My dear Helen," exclaimed her cousin, "ask me whatever you will. I see what is in your thoughts, and we two, at any rate, need not go blundering against one another for want of a little plain speaking. You

wish to know whether anything has passed between Mr. Evelyn and myself. Is that it?"

"It is."

"Then without the smallest reserve I can say that nothing whatsoever of the kind that you mean has passed between us."

"Then what is the meaning of this sudden change in his spirits, and his readiness to enter into our schemes for Francesca's benefit?"

"I cannot tell you," said Margaret, "except that putting together a number of little odds and ends of talk, I think he must have been suspecting that I cared for somebody or other, and that quite unconsciously I have revealed the important fact that I am perfectly heart-whole."

"And that is all?"

"Absolutely all."

"And you think he is going to bore himself with this bust-making, solely with a view to help Francesca?" asked Helen.

"No, I do not," replied Margaret. "I think he is really interested in the poor girl, for with all his nonsensical pretences, he has a stronger spice of the Quixote about him than any other man I ever knew. But he has found out how much I like the girl, and I fancy he would like to gratify me in helping her."

"And would you like him better if he were less Quixotic?" asked Helen.

"Far from it," said Margaret, almost energetically.

"Yet you are really heart-whole, Margaret?" said Helen. "You know that it was all for love of the beautiful Dulcinea, that the immortal Don went out to fight in defence of the oppressed and miserable."

"But you forget that Dulcinea cared nothing for her crack-brained lover," rejoined Margaret. "My dear Helen, your argument tells against your theory."

Helen laughed and admitted the mistake; but she was not yet convinced.

"I am sorry for the poor Marchese, nevertheless," she answered.

"And pity is next akin to love," rejoined Margaret, smiling mischievously in her turn, as she subsided into silence.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNEXPECTED ALLIANCE.

If Evelyn had imagined, like Mrs. Sandford, that D'Urbino would feel honoured in being commissioned to transfer his well-formed features to marble, his reception, when he called the next day to arrange the necessary preliminaries, would at once have disenchanted him. There still lingered in D'Urbino's mind a slight feeling of soreness when he remembered the headlong haste with which Evelyn had attributed to him some sort of base conduct in respect to Francesca, and though it was steadily healing, it was

enough to prevent the growth of a perfect ease and cordiality in their intercourse.

In truth, the gallant Evelyn was a trifle shy of D'Urbino, and was even just a little afraid of him. He was far from forgetting the offensive nature of the suspicions which he had taken up, and was angry with himself for the stupidity with which he had revealed it on their first encounter. Again and again he had been considering whether it would not be as well to recur to what had taken place, and make a more full apology than that which he had thought sufficient at the interview in the police-station. And now, when he found his proposal to sit for his portrait rather coldly received, he saw at once that even if D'Urbino agreed to his wishes, it would be intolerable to endure a daily *téte-à-téte* with a man who felt that he had wronged him and had made only a partial reparation.

"Perhaps, on the whole, you would rather not undertake the work," he at last found

courage to say, as D'Urbino hesitated to make any definite arrangement.

"I should hardly like to say that," replied D'Urbino; but still his hesitation could not be mistaken, and Evelyn found his position by no means agreeable.

At length he said, "Signor D'Urbino, may I be frank with you?"

"Certainly, Mr. Evelyn," replied D'Urbino. "There is nothing I should like better, if you have anything concealed."

"And you will not be offended?" continued Evelyn.

"Were it not that I remember what you said when we first met," said D'Urbino, "I should reply that you were the last man in the world from whom I should expect to hear an offensive word."

"That is precisely what I wanted to get at, only I could not see my way to it," replied Evelyn. "I have never offered you a sufficient apology for the imputations which I was such a fool as to express on that un-

lucky day. If there is anything that diminishes my regret at not having long ago apologised to you in the most ample manner for my impertinence, it is the circumstance that increased personal acquaintance has taught me that it was not only a huge blunder to blurt out my imputations, but that it was a monstrous injustice to you ever to entertain the supicions in question."

"This is an immense relief to me, Mr. Evelyn," exclaimed D'Urbino. "There is my hand. I heartily forgive you for your insinuations, and you must forgive me also for being such an idiot as to be angry with a perfect stranger, for supposing that I could have done what hundreds of young fellows would have thought scarcely a peccadillo."

And they shook hands so vigorously, that D'Urbino thought that for an Englishman, Evelyn showed a vast deal of sensibility, while Evelyn formed the opinion that for an Italian, D'Urbino was gifted with a more than creditable amount of manliness.

"Well! she certainly *has* a wonderful face, that girl," Evelyn remarked, as they sat and arranged for the commencement of the modelling. "But it's the peculiar expression that puzzles me."

"It is a singular expression," said D'Urbino, as he rose and examined the unfinished bust once more. "And it was only at the last that her face ever showed the peculiarities of that look. I never shall forget the startling effect of that sudden outbreak upon the girl's features. Of course my hasty attempts at catching and fixing her extraordinary look of sadness fail altogether to show you what it was. And now nothing will induce her to come here again. What has bewitched her I cannot conceive."

"And that other half-finished head," said Evelyn, "that is Cameriere Rinaldo, I presume."

"Are you acquainted with that person?" asked D'Urbino, surprised. "I was not

aware that you knew he was sitting to me. Who could have told you?"

"I think it was Miss Osborne, or Miss Sandford," said Evelyn, aware that he had made a fresh blunder, and suspecting that he was going to be found out.

"How could they have learnt it? I wonder," observed D'Urbino. "I thought I had never given a hint about it to them, or to any one I met at their house."

"It's not the smallest use my beating about the bush, I see, Signor D'Urbino," exclaimed Evelyn;—"or rather D'Urbino, for with your permission I shall drop the 'Signor' for the future—I never was found to play the diplomat, and I never shall succeed in getting at anything in a roundabout way. Yes! you may well look amazed at my outburst, but the fact is, I don't care a straw for being exhibited in marble. These two young ladies have been making a fool of me, and sending me here for quite another purpose. Now pray don't

look so tremendously black and thundering, my dear fellow. There's no harm done. You look as if you were stricken dumb with surprise; at any rate don't begin to speak till I've had my say quite out. Well! this is it, without any more circumlocution. These ladies—the young ladies, that is—have taken it into their heads that this same Rinaldo,—I won't call him by any hard name, as perhaps he's a friend of yours, —that this same Rinaldo means mischief of some sort or other against the girl Francesca."

"Well!" said D'Urbino gravely, "go on, I must entreat you."

"And they thought that if I sat to you as proposed, you might perhaps tell me whether you thought there was anything in the suspicion."

"In plain words, I was to be pumped," rejoined D'Urbino. "Speak plainly, Mr. Evelyn, you need stand on no ceremony surely, after this. I was certainly not

aware of the process to which I was to be subjected."

"Come now, my dear fellow," responded Evelyn, "you surely are not going to ride the high horse about it. You have too much good sense to be affronted because a couple of romantic women don't like to ask you a rather delicate question direct, especially when the lovely Francesca is concerned. You don't pretend that you have never talked diplomatically to people, when you wanted to get at information that it was important you should have, and could not get at by any other means."

"I don't remember ever to have done it," said D'Urbino, "but I should not scruple to do so, certainly."

"Of course not, as a man of sense," replied Evelyn.

"But how did these young ladies learn anything about Rinaldo's coming here?" asked D'Urbino. "That is what I cannot understand."

"Now you ask me, I think I recollect how it was," said Evelyn. "Yes, I remember it clearly. The father Giorgione himself told Miss Sandford, and moreover he confessed that he was puzzled to make out what object this Rinaldo could have in advising him to send the girl away from home."

"Are you positive that you have not misunderstood Miss Sandford's account?" asked D'Urbino, with an appearance of bewilderment and annoyance that convinced Evelyn that there was mystery somewhere.

"Perfectly so," replied Evelyn.

"And she thought that Giorgione was vexed, or that he suspected something underhand?"

"Something of the kind."

For some minutes nothing more was said, and D'Urbino strode up and down the room, followed by Evelyn's anxious eyes. He then drew a chair directly in front of Evelyn's and sat down. "Mr. Evelyn," he began.

"Evelyn, if you please, D'Urbino."

"Evelyn, then," he continued, "you have been open with me, and I will be open with you, or rather, I will trust you. But you must begin by giving me your word that not one syllable of what I say shall pass your lips, without my express permission."

"To no one?" asked Evelyn.

"To no one; not even to the ladies in whose service you have undertaken this singular enquiry."

"I give you the promise without hesitation."

"Then I will confess to you at once that I am satisfied that this man Rinaldo has some scheme on hand in which I am personally concerned, and that he has some views also in respect to Francesca Giorgione; but as to what that scheme is I am utterly in the dark, except that he is bent upon preventing any intercourse whatever between the girl and myself."

"Is it impossible that he should be doing

this in the interest of the girl herself?" asked Evelyn.

"Of course the world in general would take it for granted that his wish was to protect her from me," said D'Urbino. "That I know well enough, notwithstanding my wrath when you constituted yourself the spokesman of the world in general on that point. But on this supposition, how am I to account for that personal interest in my behalf which I am confident that for some mysterious reason this man feels? Besides, he detests this Giorgione, and warned me in the most urgent terms to have nothing to do with him or with any body who belongs to him."

"But surely there is nothing in all this incompatible with anxiety for your happiness," said Evelyn.

"How so?" asked D'Urbino.

"Why, my dear fellow, how amazingly obtuse you are. Or are you only shamming innocence and ignorance by way of testing

my gift of cross-examination ? If this man feels towards you as a friend, he naturally thinks that no permanent good can come to you, from seeing much of a girl like this Francesca. As to his abuse of her father, that is all moonshine. It is only an invention designed to keep you and the girl apart. He can't abuse Francesca herself, for he sees you wouldn't stand it, so he calumniates the father."

"You would not have taken it for a sham, if you had been here when he gave the warning. If that man was not sincere there is no sincerity left upon this earth."

"Have political complications anything to do with the mystery ?" asked Evelyn.

"Very possibly," said D'Urbino, "but there is something more than politics in the background. Giorgione is in ill odour with the government; but then so am I, though I may be less compromised than he is."

"Humph !" remarked Evelyn. "It's a deuced queer story altogether. What you

fellows expect to get by your hot-headed schemes it passes my skill to guess. Revolutions are not at all in my line; but if it's to be going in for the redress of women's grievances, especially when the women are young and pretty, I'm your man. However, we must not overlook the political aspect of the affair nevertheless. I know, of course, the character this Rinaldo has, but I am horribly incredulous about secret societies, and government spies, and all the rest of the revolutionary machinery. Now, do you seriously believe that this man is in the pay of the Papalini, and has got hold of any ugly little stories about your romantic self?"

"Of course he has the salary of his recognised and legitimate office; but what other pay he has, I have not the remotest suspicion; and as to his means for getting at people's private histories, I know little or nothing."

"Little or nothing," repeated Evelyn,

satirically. "Very well put, indeed, Signor Cavaliere. That is, you do know something, though that something is but small. Also, your ingenuity is to be commended, in that you reply to my simple-minded query concerning his possible knowledge of the escapades of the excellent young sculptor who honours me with his confidence by a vague flourish about people's private histories."

"I don't think I ought to say anything more definite," replied D'Urbino, after a few moments' thought.

"H'm!" said, or rather grunted Evelyn. "H'm! h'm! h'm! as Papageno remarks in the 'Flauto Magico,' I understand. May I ask why you are so cautious?"

"Well," said D'Urbino, "perhaps it would be scarcely honourable, and might commit ——"

"Proceed," said Evelyn, as D'Urbino paused without finishing his sentence. "It might commit whom? Rinaldo, or the Cavaliere D'Urbino."

"It will be safest to say nothing," replied D'Urbino.

"My dear D'Urbino," said Evelyn, "if it were not that it would be scarcely civil to whistle, I should venture upon that somewhat low and inarticulate, but expressive ejaculation, in reply to what you say, or rather don't say. Pray, would it be *mal à propos* to ask whether you yourself are in the secret service of the absolutist party? I hardly like the looks of things. Unawares I may be at this moment in what looks like a highly respectable studio, but is in reality a cell, or a court of injustice, or the place of meeting of a modern *vehmgericht*."

"As you are the examiner," said D'Urbino, laughing, "and I am the examinee, and in fact the whole explanation is entirely of your seeking, you must conduct the examination after your own fashion. If, as I think, Rinaldo means well towards me, I had rather say nothing about my conclusions respecting him. More than that, I don't

believe he has any ill-will to Francesca herself. He is perpetually looking at her head there, and protesting that he can't get her face out of his thoughts."

"With your leave, D'Urbino," rejoined Evelyn, "it is absolutely essential that I should whistle at this stage of your revelations. However, I will spare your feelings, only adding that it throws a new light upon our little drama, to find that the great mysterious evil-doer is a connoisseur in female beauty. Well! he exhibits a cultivated taste; so much may be said in his favour. Do you know, I am myself burning to see more of this same fascinating heroine of yours? Only it appears that she is in the sulks, or something very like it, and I prefer pretty women when they are all smiles and sunshine."

"And how about plain women?" said D'Urbino.

"I never prefer them at all," rejoined Evelyn. "Ugly men are endurable, though

not always. By the way, what is the villain in our drama himself like? Does he wear a perpetual scowl? Has he a splendid nose, aquiline of course, and slightly Hebraic? His eyes, I need not ask, are black and terribly piercing, when he ventures to look honest men in the face; and of his lips, especially the upper lip, nothing is to be said, but that they are indescribable?"

"You are utterly and ludicrously wrong," said D'Urbino. "This is one of the things that puzzle me. His look is as open as that of any face I ever beheld. He has an odd dreaming expression, to be sure, and has a way of looking fixedly before him, as if his thoughts were a hundred miles away."

"Ah! of course he has," rejoined Evelyn; "he is ever watching the ghosts of former crimes, looming in the dim obscure. Clearly, a man of many atrocities, and capable of any wickedness in the matter of the beautiful Francesca, and the accomplished D'Urbino. But now seriously, D'Urbino,

what is to be the first step towards defeating the machinations of this melancholy monster? for I take it he looks melancholy, though you did not say so."

"I am at the end of my resources," replied D'Urbino.

"At the end!" echoed Evelyn; "why, my dear fellow, you're not yet at the beginning of them! You don't seem to have any resources at all. I tell you what we will do We will sit down in front of the beleaguered fortress, and open our parallels; which is an extremely bad metaphor for making some arrangement by which I may be present when the man Rinaldo comes next to be operated upon by you. It was a happy inspiration after all, which suggested the notion that you should make a bust of me, and we'll begin it instantly. We must be both of us intolerable bunglers, if we can't so manage that I shall be with you while you are at work on him, and so I can watch him unobserved and at the same

time exercise upon him all that inimitable skill in pumping of which you were to have been the victim."

"What next?" said D'Urbino.

"That I can't say," replied Evelyn. "Or what do you think of giving me some lessons in modelling? By Jove! I'd rather a thousand times come as a pupil than as a sitter. And while you are working away at your villain's face, I will watch your process, and make humble attempts at doing the same."

"Your attempts will be more humble than you expect," said D'Urbino, "but I rather take to the idea." And so it was finally arranged between them.

CHAPTER VII.

PRELIMINARIES.

"I TRUST you found Signor D'Urbino much gratified at the commission you gave him yesterday," observed Mrs. Sandford to Evelyn, when he called upon her on the following morning.

"My dear Mrs. Sandford," replied Evelyn, who was now again in his wildest spirits, "that scheme is given up altogether."

Margaret and Helen looked surprised and by no means gratified, but Mrs. Sandford retained her usual composure, only observing that she trusted that D'Urbino had

not been asking an exorbitant price for his work.

"To tell you the truth," said Evelyn, "we never came to the subject of prices at all. I have been seriously considering the state of my finances, and have come to the conclusion that I ought to do something to earn my own living."

The gravity with which he made this announcement did not impose upon the credulity of the two cousins, but Mrs. Sandford, who could never see a joke in anything, expressed a sincere hope that he had received no bad news from home.

"No, it's not that exactly, you know," he went on; "but as I might be ruined any day, just as you might be ruined, Mrs. Sandford, I have been thinking that it is as well to be prepared for the worst. So D'Urbino is going to give me lessons in his own art."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mrs. Sandford.

"At what charge?" interposed Helen.

"For nothing," replied Evelyn.

"Really, Mr. Evelyn, you forget yourself," observed Mrs. Sandford. "A gentleman ought never to accept favours of this kind. You are putting yourself in a false position towards this young man."

"I dare say he'll give me something when my services are worth anything to him," said Evelyn, while Margaret walked to the window to hide her amusement.

"I fail to understand you, Mr. Evelyn," said her aunt, with imperturbable gravity.

"Why, you know one must begin at the beginning in all things," rejoined Evelyn; "so at first I shall only be employed to wet the clay, and sweep the studio floor, and other such little useful trifles."

"And run on errands, perhaps," suggested Helen.

"Exactly so," he replied. "D'Urbino is very liberal about it. He thinks after a few weeks he can afford to give me a couple of pauls a day for my services. 'Evelyn,

my dear fellow,' he said, 'you look as if you would be a handy assistant, and I'm sure we shall get on together.'"

During these last speeches Mrs. Sandford's eyes and mouth went on gradually opening wider and wider, and as he ended, it suddenly occurred to her that Evelyn was going mad, or that he was deliberately affronting her.

"Mr. Evelyn," she said, "this is going too far. You forget yourself strangely; unless, indeed——" And she hesitated to finish her sentence.

"A thousand pardons! my dear Mrs. Sandford," he exclaimed, seeing how matters stood. "Of course this is all nonsense, except that I have really a fancy for a few lessons in modelling, and D'Urbino is such a good fellow, that it will be quite a pleasure to take them. Honestly, too, it is very good-natured in him to go out of his way to please me, and as to any fees in return, it would be an affront to offer them!"

"Persons should never be above their station in life," replied Mrs. Sandford, with solemn stateliness, as she rose to leave the room. "As you will, however; but I shall certainly speak to Signor D'Urbino on the subject of his charges, as we expect him this evening, and Margaret has been saying she would like something of the kind, before we leave Rome."

"Oh! my most demure and innocent cousin Margaret!" said Helen to herself. "Now, I wonder whether this scheme about the bust was planned with any other object, except counteracting the wiles of the wicked Rinaldo."

"What does all this mean, Mr. Evelyn?" she said aloud, as soon as her mother had closed the door behind her.

"It means exactly what I have said, and nothing more," he replied. "And are you really thinking of taking these lessons, Miss Osborne?" he continued, as Margaret resumed her seat.

"I did once mention the subject to my aunt, I believe, when we first came here," she replied; "but I had nearly forgotten it. What is it that amuses you, Helen, so wonderfully?" she added, as Helen smiled with a significant smile.

"Nothing, my dear," said her cousin. "But about this Rinaldo and his schemes, what have you discovered?"

"There," he replied, "I grieve to say I must disappoint you. I am not at liberty to repeat what I have learnt to any one. Certainly not at present."

"To neither of us?" continued Helen.

"To neither," he replied.

"Not even to *her?*" she went on, with a glance at Margaret. "Or, perhaps it is with respect to her, that you say you cannot repeat anything at present only."

"Helen is more than usually mischievous to day, Mr. Evelyn," interposed Margaret, "Is there really nothing that you can say, to set our minds at ease?"

"Indeed," he replied; "I must disappoint you; I can only add that I have no reason to think matters are worse than I thought them before I saw D'Urbino yesterday."

"Is there a scheme of any sort going on?" asked Helen. "Surely you can tell us so much as this."

"Not even this," he said.

"And you and D'Urbino understand one another about it?" asked Helen.

"Perfectly," he replied.

"Now is not this a most abominable proceeding, Margaret?" exclaimed Helen. "Here is Mr. Evelyn, who has obtained from us all his knowledge about the mystery in hand; and the only return he makes us is to take Signor D'Urbino into his confidence, and to leave us in a state of mingled agitation, curiosity and alarm. Thus it is that men ever repay the good they receive from women. Is it not too bad?"

"I did not say that I took D'Urbino into my confidence," said Evelyn, amused with

the mock indignation with which Helen wished to conceal her vexation at being left in the dark.

"Listen to him, Margaret," she cried; "he did not *say* that he did this. But he did it, nevertheless. Come, Mr. Evelyn," she continued, in her prettiest coaxing way, "remember that the secret is *our* secret, and that you had no right whatever to communicate it to anybody without our express permission. Whatever you and Signor D'Urbino are plotting, we have a right to know. Is it not so, Margaret?"

"I don't quite see the reasoning, my dear," said Margaret; "but I agree with you that it is annoying to be shut out of the theatre just when the play is beginning to be most interesting."

There was no doubt that Evelyn was every whit as much annoyed at being unable to grant Margaret's request as she was in being refused the information she wished for; while Helen drew from the fact a fresh

confirmation of her suspicions as to the seriousness of Evelyn's feeling towards her cousin.

"Believe me," he said to Margaret, "I have seldom in all my life been so grieved as I am in being compelled not to satisfy your very natural wishes to know everything that has passed between D'Urbino and myself. If I had had the faintest anticipation that it would give you pain, nothing should have induced me to have entered on the undertaking."

"One thing you may surely tell us," replied Margaret. "You have learnt nothing against this poor girl, personally."

"Nothing whatsoever," said he.

"And you have no fresh reasons for apprehending mischief to her?" she continued.

"I cannot tell you how it pains me to give you ambiguous replies," returned Evelyn. "But I am pledged to secresy, and at the same time have been compelled to be

myself satisfied with only half the information which I am anxious for."

"Well, well!" said Helen, with a pretended sigh; "we must submit to the decrees of fate, in the person of Mr. Charles Evelyn. I am satisfied; and you will come this evening, and be extremely agreeable to atone for your cruelty."

"And you are satisfied also, Miss Osborne," said Evelyn, "I hope."

"*Au revoir!*" Margaret replied, instead of answering his question directly. But when Evelyn felt that she gently returned the warm pressure of his hand as they parted, it was but natural that he should interpret it as implying something more than a frigid forgiveness.

In the evening he presented himself a trifle earlier than he was expected, being not a little anxious that Mrs. Sandford should be induced to say nothing to D'Urbino as to the teaching fees that she had threatened to inquire about. There would

have been nothing, of course, in the inquiry itself, but he was well aware that Mrs. Sandford's hauteur towards all people whom she thought not quite her social equals would be sure to display itself, and that D'Urbino's pride would take alarm, and mar everything. Happily he found Helen alone, and she readily undertook to persuade her mother to act as she wished. Satisfied as to this possible source of trouble, Evelyn's spirits rose to their highest pitch. He was gradually coming to the conviction that he liked Margaret better than anybody else in the world, and it was dawning upon him that possibly she might come to think about him as he thought about her. He was even debating within himself whether he should not cautiously introduce the subject of her merits while Helen and he were still alone, when Margaret herself appeared, looking in his eyes more captivating than ever.

"What are you two plotting so mysteriously together?" she cried.

"You would indeed guess that we were plotting if you knew what I have in my pocket," said he. "Here is the genuine weapon for conspirators that I told you about." And he produced a small revolver, its mountings all in silver, and altogether finished after the pattern of a jewel rather than of an instrument of death. "I found it just arrived when I got home this afternoon, and I have brought it to show you what an appropriate gift I have received. Now who shall be its first victim, Miss Sandford? Imagine me now in the act of shooting down the oppressors of the peerless Francesca."

And he threw himself into a melodramatic attitude, pointing the pistol at his imaginary victim.

"Gracious Heavens!" cried Mrs. Sandford, just at that moment entering the room. "He *is* mad, after all." Then with a shriek of horror, she turned to fly and call for help, and was scarcely re-assured or con-

vinced that the pistol was not loaded, when Della Porta was announced, and tranquillity restored.

"Are you a connoisseur in revolvers, Marchese?" asked Margaret, by way of something to say, as nobody else seemed inclined to talk. "We were just on the point of having a lesson in their use."

The Marchese's habitual self-possessed politeness would not allow him to reply that he supposed this was only a fresh illustration of the eccentricities of English-women, and he contented himself with suggesting a hope that the lesson would be given with an unloaded weapon.

"But we shall not be satisfied unless Mr. Evelyn teaches us to load and fire," replied Margaret.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Della Porta; "is that your desire also, Miss Sandford?"

"Do you wish to know my honest opinion?" asked Helen, thus appealed to. "I am ashamed to own that in the matter of fire-arms I am a coward."

"But only with fire-arms, Helen," interposed Margaret, warmly. "Don't let the Marchese think you are a coward in anything else."

"I should scarcely apply so harsh a term to a feeling not at all discreditable to a woman," replied the polished Marchese, speaking, however, with undisguised sincerity.

"I must look on, nevertheless," said Helen, "while you take your lesson, Margaret. Pray proceed with it, Mr. Evelyn."

Thus enjoined, Evelyn explained the whole construction of the weapon, including the loading, except that he charged it with powder only. Margaret's interest in the operation was noticed by the Marchese with astonishment, and he attributed it altogether to her insular oddity, rather than to any special regard for the teacher who imparted the lesson. "Happily," he reflected, "if I *do* marry an Englishwoman, it is well that this fair damsel has not taken me in

her toils." With gratification, too, he remarked that when Margaret insisted upon putting the lesson into immediate practice by herself going through the entire process, Helen's attention slackened and died away. Margaret, however, was satisfied with nothing less than a thorough mastery of the whole, qualifying herself, she said, in a jesting whisper to Helen, for taking an active part in the catastrophe to which Mr. Evelyn and Signor D'Urbino were blindly leading them. Mrs. Sandford's remonstrances about the impropriety of meddling with dangerous weapons were only so far successful as to prevail upon Evelyn to place the pistol, though loaded with powder only, on a shelf in an ante-room, where it could do no harm to anybody. D'Urbino soon afterwards made his appearance, and the conversation became general.

Later on in the evening, Evelyn, finding that anything like a pleasant private conversation with Margaret was out of the ques-

tion, grew restless and fidgety, and protested that the air was intolerably warm within doors, and that the night was so splendid, notwithstanding the season of the year, that it was too bad not to take advantage of it for a quiet stroll and a cigar in the silent street below. D'Urbino was easily persuaded to go with him; and the two cousins, finding it a little dull with nobody but themselves to talk to, Della Porta being in close conference with Mrs. Sandford, proposed to mount on to the roof of the house to test Evelyn's assertion as to the warmth and beauty of the night.

As in the case of many houses in Rome, this roof was flat, and was a pleasant place enough on a summer evening. In January, sitting still was out of the question, and the cousins were constrained to keep themselves warm by walking to and fro. The roof was twice as large as Mrs. Sandford's house itself, extending over the neighbouring house, the lower portion of which was occu-

pied by the mosaic-worker, the upper floors being at present untenanted, and made use of by Giorgione to stow away a quantity of old furniture that was in his possession. The two houses had, in fact, been originally one, and had been separated by blocking up the doors which led from one set of rooms to the other. On the highest floor this blocking up had been neglected, the purchaser of the building from its former owner considering that the double solid oak doors which he found existing were amply sufficient to secure the privacy of everybody who might occupy the houses. As each occupier commanded the locks and bolts of one door, it was impossible to pass from one house to the other without the consent of both parties.

After interchanging a few common-places about the splendour of the stars as compared with the lesser brilliancy of an English sky, the cousins relapsed into silence, and continued their walk side by side, each

full of her own thoughts. By-and-bye, Helen paused and bade Margaret stop and listen. They heard nothing, and resumed their pacings to and fro. Again Helen stood still and listened.

"What is it?" asked her cousin, a little puzzled at Helen's looks.

"Listen," replied Helen, speaking low. "Yes, there it is again. I was confident that it was not my fancy only."

"I hear a faint knocking or tapping that seems to be exactly under our feet," said Margaret. "Now it is gone," she continued. "Perhaps after all it is only some door moving backwards and forwards in the wind that blows in through the broken windows in those half empty rooms."

"There is not a breath of air stirring," rejoined Helen, "that noise is made by human hands, and by nothing else."

"And what then?" asked Margaret. "It is only Giorgione pottering about among his decayed old furniture, and driving in a few

nails to keep it from quite tumbling to pieces."

"My dear Margaret," said Helen, "Giorgione is away from home; he went away this morning, and Francesca told me that he would not be back till to-morrow. There is nobody in the house but Francesca and the servant maid."

"Then it must be Francesca, or the maid at work there," said Margaret.

"Out of the question, Margaret," replied Helen. "In the first place, they are never out of bed at this hour. And in the next place, Giorgione allows no access to any of those upper rooms; he keeps the keys of them all himself, and Francesca says that she has never been in them without her father."

"What on earth can it be then?" asked Margaret, now a trifle alarmed. "Yes! there it goes again! It must be a thief, or something worse than a thief."

"Whatever he is, he is knocking gently

at something or other," said Helen. "What ought we to do, Margaret? we ought to go down instantly and give the alarm."

"My dear Helen," replied Margaret, "we will do nothing of the kind. If that man is here for mischief, he ought to be seized at once; if not, we shall only frighten the whole household, and be laughed at for our silly pains."

"What will you do then?" said Helen. "Settle one way or other without delay."

"If the noise is really exactly under our feet," Margaret replied, "it must come from the room that is shut off from our highest storey by that huge door which is always tantalising my curiosity."

"Well?" replied Helen, "what then?"

"We will try whether we can hear anything more by listening at this same door," said Margaret. "Come, my dear, we may perhaps be on the eve of an adventure, and we must help each other, and screw each other's courage up. I confess that my

heart is beating rather too fast already, which is the result of pure cowardice, for no harm can possibly happen to us from listening on the outside of a thick door."

"Probabilities certainly are against it," observed Helen; "nevertheless, I wish you would let me call my mother."

"What? and have the fastidious Marchese down upon us!" exclaimed Margaret. "Not for the world, Helen. Surely there is time enough when we know that we are not inventing hobgoblins to frighten ourselves with. My trust is in the oak door, as I said just now. You don't suppose that our thief is going to run us through the body with those big panels between him and us, as Hamlet served the unfortunate Polonius when he got behind the arras."

To this Helen had no reply to make, and they re-entered the house by the staircase which opened upon the roof.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE USE OF A REVOLVER.

Passing by the ante-room where lay the powder-loaded revolver reposing on a shelf, it suddenly occurred to Margaret that it was just within the limits of possibility that they might encounter some real peril, and paying no heed to the remonstrances of her cousin, she quietly took up the weapon and placed it carefully in her own pocket.

"It will kill nobody, it is true," she said, "but it may be useful to give an alarm, if we are surrounded by our foes. What a happy thought it was of Mr. Evelyn, that brought him to show off his new toy; and

what a brilliant thought of mine, that made me learn how to use it."

"You are getting too much excited, Margaret," remonstrated her cousin. "For heaven's sake put that pistol back again."

Margaret's only reply was to run hastily up the stairs, and beckon to Helen to follow.

By no means liking the business, Helen decided at once that it would be scandalous to allow her impetuous cousin to go on alone, and she followed her with all speed.

Entering the chamber which they sought, their first care was to place a screen between the window and the light they brought with them from below, fearing that possibly it might be noticed from without, and give the alarm to any confederate who might be aiding the supposed thief in his nefarious work. Notwithstanding the beauty of the night, the old glass in the window, never very transparent, was begrimed with the dust and dirt of years, the room being used as a place for stowing the boxes and trunks of the

baggage-loving English people who usually hired the house as successive winters came round. Nevertheless, the cousins agreed that it was impossible to be too cautious, and the candle was duly placed so as to give no indication that the chamber was otherwise than in its usual state of solitude.

Then with half frightened eagerness, Margaret applied her ear to the keyhole of the door and listened.

"What do you hear?" asked Helen, in a hurried whisper.

"Nothing whatever," replied Margaret, and listened again.

"Still nothing," she continued, after a minute's further strained attention. "Your hearing is quicker, Helen; take my place, you heard the noise out of doors before I did."

Helen took her cousin's place, and immediately exclaimed, "I hear it again, as plainly as ever. What in the name of heaven can it be, Margaret?"

"Mr. Evelyn would probably say rats!" replied Margaret; "and I have heard wonderful stories of people being frightened out of their senses by mysterious nocturnal sounds which turned out to come from a stable close by. Perhaps this is the same. Are there any stables down below, have you ever noticed?"

"That is impossible," said Helen. "There is nothing below, except the narrow court yard at the back of the two houses, and beyond that a narrow lane. Hush! hush!" she continued; "I hear it again, but there is quite a little gale of wind blowing through this clumsy old key-hole. What can it possibly be? There is something fallen heavily, and the other noise is stopped!"

"Do you think it is in the room next us?" whispered Margaret. "Perhaps it is in the lower floor?"

"That I can't say," whispered Helen, "but it is in the house, and not outside; of

that I am absolutely certain. Take my place, and try to hear yourself."

Then quickly rising from her knees to exchange places with Margaret, without a thought of the luckless candle she whisked her ample dress upon the flame, and they were left in nearly total darkness.

"Quick! Helen!" cried Margaret, "it's useless complaining. I will stay and listen while you go for a fresh light."

Groping her way out, Helen obeyed, and Margaret, feeling the huge panels of the dividing door all over, in search of a possible crack or cleft, felt a current of air flowing steadily through a crevice so far from the floor that she could barely reach it. Then stumbling about among the packing cases and portmanteaus, and trembling at every sound she made, she drew a box quietly forward and mounting upon it, again placed her hands upon the crack she had discovered. That so steady a stream of air should flow upon her, notwithstanding the

barriers presented by the second door which she had understood to exist on the other side, seemed incomprehensible.

A hasty look through the chink betrayed the fact that, if such second door existed, it was thrown wide open. She could see distinctly into the chamber beyond, at least so far as to be assured that it was not in total darkness, the sensibilities of her own eyes to light being quickened by the obscurity from the midst of which she was looking. The light, however, such as it was, did not proceed from any lamp or candle that she could see, but came from another room beyond, through an opening, apparently glazed, which allowed only the feeblest of rays to pass through it.

As she peered into the barely enlightened gloom, she heard the old noise begin again; and there was no longer the remotest doubt that it was produced by a hammer, or some similar tool.

She had just come to this conclusion,

when Helen appeared with a small lighted hand-lamp.

"Margaret!" she cried, as loudly as she dared. "You are as pale as death! you have found it out! I see it by your scared looks."

"Mount up here in my place, and see for yourself," replied Margaret; "but there is nothing to fear, at any rate as yet."

"Gracious heavens, Margaret," exclaimed her cousin, "there is no other door, and we might have been murdered in our beds at any time."

"You forget that the locks and bolts of this one door are all on our side," replied Margaret. "Yes, they seem to be all right, and strong enough," she went on, as she took the lamp and examined the fastenings narrowly.

"Is it against wood, or against a stone wall, that the man is hammering?" asked Helen. "Oh! Margaret! how very dreadful!" she cried, her heart throbbing violently.

"Is it possible that he should be forcing his way towards us, and means to break open this one wretched protection?"

"Let me mount again," rejoined her cousin; "surely I detected a door leading into the farther room. He would never be knocking against the walls, if there was a way through, ready to his hand. The noise is most certainly made by a number of gentle blows against a wall," she added, after listening again. "I can hear something like a scraping between the blows of the hammer. There is no fear of danger to us. But what conceivable villainy is really going on there?"

Unconsciously leaning in her eagerness against the upper panels of the door, Margaret suddenly started away in manifest fright.

"The door moves, Helen!" she whispered. "The fastenings are not safe. Give me the lamp, and let me examine the state they are in. God preserve us! The bolts fit

into their places so loosely that the slightest push would force the door open upon us."

Still more alarmed, they next examined the lock itself more closely than before, and found that what with rust and ill-usage, the iron plate into which it fitted gave way at once.

"Helen!" exclaimed Margaret, "I must try whether the door will open."

"For God's sake, do nothing of the kind," cried her cousin. "Are you mad, Margaret? we must instantly barricade it instead, with the biggest of these boxes that we can move."

"Come with me, or not, my dear, as you please," said Margaret, her spirits rising with the progress of the discovery, and secretly rejoicing in the possession of the revolver. "There can be no harm in just opening the door for a few moments."

"I will go and alarm the whole house, Margaret, if you go on with this mad obsti-

nacy," cried Helen, her anger overcoming both her curiosity and her fears.

"And in the meantime I shall quietly walk into this chamber of mystery," said Margaret, "and investigate the proceedings of that midnight burglar through that window on the other side."

"Margaret!" exclaimed her cousin. "Is this a time for joking? For heaven's sake come away, or they will be raising the house to find us."

"I am as serious as I ever was in my life," replied Margaret. "If you like to go, go! If you like to come, come! And now for this wonderful protecting door! There!" she said, in triumph, as it yielded to her hand, what a pleasant state of delusion have we been living in for these weeks past! And there is the second door wide open, and may have been so for years and years."

"What a dreadful thing to think of!" said Helen. "But you shall not stir from here with my consent, Margaret." And she

seized her cousin's arm with the firmest grasp that she could accomplish.

"Don't be absurd, Helen!" was Margaret's only reply. "If you and I take to wrestling with each other, you will make the pistol go off in my pocket, and we shall be in flames in a moment."

Helen started away at the mere thought of such a catastrophe, and again entreated her cousin to pause in her determination, but all that she could extract was a promise to observe the utmost caution, and an injunction to deposit the lamp in a place of safety.

"Now then, my dear," said Margaret, "are you prepared for the adventure? Take my advice and attend to your draperies, for the room smells terribly of damp and dust. There can have been nobody in it for generations, I suspect. That is a consolation for us in our terrors."

"If you insist on going, of course I go with you, my dear Margaret," replied Helen.

"Surely, you don't suppose I would leave you to run into danger all alone."

"Danger!" echoed Margaret. "There is none at all. It is simply a case of romantic adventure. Perhaps we shall discover some delightful horrors in this deserted chamber, —a skeleton or two, or an assortment of daggers for assassination."

"How can you possibly utter such nonsense, at such a time?" replied Helen. "And your heart is beating as fast as mine," she added, as they went forward, clasping each other's hands in the obscurity.

"Because I wish to screw up my own courage," said Margaret, "as much as yours. Don't think I'm not frightened. Only I consider myself to be a fool for being frightened at goblins of my own making. Go on I must. There is mischief going on over there, and for Francesca's sake I will find it out. Now, first of all, for that door before us."

Walking slowly across the room, the cousins stood silent at the door, and listened for several moments. There could no longer be any doubt as to the source of the sounds they had been hearing. They were clearly produced by some person at work upon the surface of a wall, varied by slight taps which seemed to be struck gently upon some wooden substance, whether furniture or some other description, the listeners could not tell. Holding their breath with mingled curiosity and fear, they were confirmed in their conjectures by an occasional sound, as of a man's limbs or shoes moving upon the floor, with every now and then the special kind of sigh with which a person eagerly and laboriously at work relieves himself in the intervals between ceasing and recommencing his toil.

Not daring to speak while in such close proximity to the supposed burglar, and vainly searching for some crevice through which to espy his proceedings, Margaret and Helen

retreated some steps before venturing upon discussing the next step to be taken. Their eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, as they had taken the precaution to close the door by which they had entered, and they saw, though with some difficulty, that the room was empty, the only sign of its occupation in time past being an old curtain drawn across one of the corners, close to the glazed opening through which the faint light found its way from the adjoining chamber.

Scarcely daring to whisper, and moving with the utmost caution, Margaret led the unwilling Helen by the hand towards this curtain, and drawing it partially aside, they felt their way behind it. It concealed nothing—except a couple of chairs, so rickety that it was only the stimulus of an irresistible curiosity which tempted Margaret to mount one of them, in the hope that she could thus ascertain what was taking place on the other side of the partition.

The thick dust accumulated on the glass of the window effectually screened her from the other side, and thus well satisfied as to her security she ventured on, softly clearing it away to the extent of two or three inches, to allow her to solve the mystery.

A sight not very unlike what she had expected, met her eyes. She saw a large room, nearly filled with old-fashioned and apparently decaying furniture. Tables, chairs, book-shelves, looking-glasses, and a host of odds and ends, were scattered in confusion, seemingly just as they had been brought in. A few pictures were on the walls, chiefly portraits; but there was so little light that it was difficult to ascertain what they were in detail.

A man was engaged in some strange occupation, but what was its exact nature it was impossible to say, as it was only his feet and legs, up to the knees, that were visible from the spot where Margaret stood. A small heap of papers—some of them

looking like letters—lay upon the floor at his side, and after a while he turned round, so as to be able to take them up and examine them, as Margaret supposed; but still she could not see his head or face. After the examination, or whatever it was, he laid them down where they were before, but in some sort of order, seeming not to be able to satisfy himself in their arrangement.

Then the noises began again. The same interchange of tapping and scraping, and of sounds seeming to be produced sometimes by blows upon wood, and sometimes by blows upon stone, recommenced. Unable longer to endure the suspense, as soon as she heard the renewed noises, Helen could refrain no longer from speaking. To her entreaties for information as to what she saw, Margaret only replied by whispering to her to mount the other chair, and see for herself.

Trembling with excitement, Helen did as

she was bidden; but in her nervous agitation shook the chair so that it rattled for a moment upon the floor. The sound plainly startled the man whom they were watching, for he instantly paused in his occupation, and rose to his feet. Slowly and silently he then threaded his way through the wilderness of furniture around him, looking anxiously for some sign to tell him what it was that he had heard. Apparently he was satisfied with his search, for he seemed to be about to resume his work, when his attention was caught by one of the portraits on the walls. For some minutes he stood in front of it, and was lost in thought. Then taking up the small hand-lamp which lighted him in his work, he held it up to the same picture and gazed at it long and fixedly.

When he at last turned away from it, and the cousins for the first time obtained a clear view of his features, Margaret could no longer restrain herself.

"Helen," she whispered, "I have seen that man before. But where can I have come across such a villainous face? Was it in a picture, or in a private house, or in the streets, or where was it?"

"So it strikes me," replied Helen; "and surely I have seen that very picture, too, or some other wonderfully like it."

"And what a horrible face the man himself has!" said Margaret. "It will haunt me like a bad dream for ever."

"Then dream of the portrait by way of counteraction," replied Helen, "for a more attractive countenance I never saw."

She had hardly uttered the words, when, in her anxiety to detect the real nature of the man's misdeeds, she forgot the fragile nature of her support, and moved so carelessly, that the chair gave way altogether, and fell with herself to the ground.

Margaret's horror at the accident was for a moment overpowered by the intensity of her anxiety to ascertain the effects of the

crash upon the object of their watch. She saw him start violently forward and stare around the room. Then he hastily seized the heap of papers on the floor and thrust them into his pockets, and having thus secured them, he strode to the door which separated the two rooms and threw it wide open.

It was too late to think of flight, and their only hope was that the terrible man would not think of searching their place of concealment.

"Thank God I brought the pistol!" thought Margaret to herself; but neither she nor Helen dared utter a sound, and they dreaded lest their mere breathing should betray them.

At first they had strong hope that the danger would speedily be over, for the man contented himself with gazing into the obscurity of the room, and of course he detected nothing. But just as he seemed to be satisfied, his eyes caught a feeble

glimmer shining through the chinks in the door which separated the two houses. Without hesitation he at once walked forwards, guided by the faint light itself; and they were confident that he was listening for some sound beyond. As none was heard, he proceeded to try the handle of the door, and to the inexpressible distress of the unfortunate girls, as they followed his movements through a narrow opening in the curtain that concealed them, they saw him walk boldly forwards and disappear in the room they had lately left.

Terrified as to what was to be his next proceeding, the cousins clung to one another with a passionate clasp. What the man was now engaged in they trembled even to speak of to one another, though each one guessed the other's thoughts. Would he pursue his investigation beyond the chamber they had just left? Would he help himself to any jewels or money that he might light upon in the various bedrooms? Would

he frighten Mrs. Sandford out of her senses by breaking in upon her? Would he be handed over to the police, and would their own share in the story be revealed for the edification of the whole English society in Rome? or would he come back and discover them, and cut their throats by way of securing their silence?

"It is well, indeed, that I have the pistol," Margaret again thought to herself, as this last dreadful alternative suggested itself.

As it turned out, not one of these fears was realised, at least for the present. The man was too prudent to risk a further search into Mrs. Sandford's house, and he returned hastily to his work. No sooner were the cousins alone than Margaret again took up her place of observation, convinced that the housebreaker would now finish his task with all possible speed. She saw at once that he had no time to lose, for the light of his lamp was waning, and such

operations as he was conducting would be impossible in the darkness. His first act was to empty his pockets of the papers so hastily thrust into them. These he seemed to be anxiously examining, and they could even hear him utter a savage execration as he found the task of studying them grow more and more difficult in the increasing gloom.

At length he seemed to be forced to decisive action without more delay. He swept the whole collection from the floor on which he had spread them, and carried them into a part of the room where Margaret's eyes could not follow him. Then came a hammering less careful and guarded than before, and a rough dragging about of pieces of furniture. This soon came to an end, and when it was over, the man hastened away, his lamp barely enabling him to find his way to the door by which he must first have entered, and which he closed carefully behind him.

With a cry of relief and gratitude, Margaret and Helen threw aside the curtains which had saved them from the ruffian's vengeance, and rushed back to the room where their own light still burned brightly. Their first impulse was to fling themselves into one another's arms without restraint. Their second thought was to return to the scene of the scoundrel's villainy, and search for some tokens of his mysterious handiwork. That all peril was over they felt thoroughly assured, and sleep would be impossible for the whole night unless their curiosity was so far gratified.

Very different, however, would have been their conclusions, if they could have heard the angry exclamation of the man from whom they now dreaded nothing, as he emerged below into the open air in the court-yard behind.

"Ten thousand devils!" he cried, grinding his teeth in his rage, as he felt in his pockets to satisfy certain doubts that crossed his

mind. "I have left the other papers behind me! There is nothing for it but to go back, and bring everything away, and run the whole risk again."

Meanwhile, the cousins had plucked up courage to put their resolution in force. They returned to the deserted chamber, and were vainly seeking for some token to show them the precise spot of the depredations just concluded. The whole room corresponded in appearance with that portion of it which they had observed from their hiding place. Everywhere was the same litter and lumber of old and forgotten pictures, books and furniture. They were still standing in the middle of it all, when the door was thrown hastily open, and the ruffian himself stood before them. The lamp which Margaret carried in her left hand, and which she was holding above her head, threw its full light upon the man's face and figure, and scarcely a less brightness upon Helen.

For an instant they were all three trans-

fixed with amazement. Then the ruffian swore a frightful oath, and stepped forward, meaning mischief so plainly, that nothing but overwhelming dread stifled the shriek with which Helen would have cried for assistance. Swift as thought, Margaret drew the pistol from her pocket, and presented it at the savage scoundrel. Her cheeks were deadly pale, but he saw the steady glare of her eyes, and the pistol was within half a dozen yards of his head. He stopped and began to parley, asking her what she meant by daring to come into a house not her own. As he spoke, Margaret saw that he was stealthily moving towards her with the aim of closing with her before she could fire.

"Stir another step forwards, and I fire," was her sole reply.

He stood still, but the lamp-light flashed upon the blade of a long knife that he cautiously drew from its place of concealment on his person.

Margaret's finger was still steady upon the trigger of the revolver, and as the scoundrel dashed at her, with knife glittering in his uplifted hand, she fired. The man uttered a savage cry and fell to the ground, and Margaret and Helen rushed from the room to their first place of observation. There they made themselves secure by hastily barricading the old door, and when the violent labour was over, Margaret fainted dead upon the floor.

The swoon, however, was quickly over, and to Helen's dismay, nothing would satisfy her cousin but a return to the spot where she was convinced the ruffian lay either dead or mortally wounded. To the first sense of immeasurable relief, had succeeded an inexpressible dread that the man had died in the midst of his crimes, and by her hand.

"It was in self-defence, Margaret," Helen remonstrated with her. "He would have murdered both of us; and who ever heard of a man's being killed with powder only?"

"Suppose that the shot was not all drawn by Mr. Evelyn, when he showed me how to load?" replied Margaret. "Such things do happen, and the wretched man fell backwards as if he was dead! Besides, it was through my folly that we went there at all," cried Margaret, in her misery. "At least, let us listen for some sound of his movements. If he is alive, we shall hear his groanings, if he is dead, there will be perfect silence."

After many entreaties, Helen consented that they should once more venture forth. The silence was complete. They advanced step by step, pausing repeatedly, and ready to fly, but not a sound met their ears. On they went, but it was still the same. They held their lamp so as to throw its beams upon the very spot where the wretched man had fallen, but he was gone, without leaving a trace behind.

CHAPTER IX.

GUARDIANS OF THE NIGHT.

The beauty of the night tempted Evelyn and his companion to stroll farther into the heart of the city than they had at first intended. They were led on also by certain signs of a possible disturbance which struck their eyes as they passed any specially dark or unfrequented street or piazza. Here and there small groups of men stood conversing eagerly, but relapsed into silence on the approach of D'Urbino and Evelyn. Every person who met them glanced hastily in their faces and passed on.

Crossing the Corso they encountered a

company of soldiers, marching rapidly along. After them came a body of police, armed after the Roman fashion; and from more than one house they saw other police agents coming back from what must have been a domiciliary search. Judging from the looks of the men, indeed, these searches must have proved fruitless; nevertheless, there could be no doubt that the authorities were prepared for some sort of disturbance, though D'Urbino assured Evelyn that in all probability they were the victims of false information.

"That is part of the interminable wretchedness of this state of things," he said, in return to Evelyn's enquiries. "What between a childish love of hoaxing the government, and serious schemes for throwing dust in the eyes of its instruments, nobody knows what is going to happen; and we go on year after year in this miserable uncertainty."

"Then you think there is no chance of

our coming in for a row to-night?" asked Evelyn.

"You don't mean to say that you of all men in the world, would like such a thing?" replied D'Urbino, with a laugh. "But I never believe in your pretended apathetic dilettantism."

"My dear fellow," said Evelyn, "you are entirely mistaken, or rather I ought to say that I am the battle field upon which two hostile powers fight for victory. The spirit of peace contends with a spirit that loves mischief; and from the time I used to get dragged into a street fight at school, I never could resist the delights of what we used to call a shindy. Ah! I wonder whether they keep up the old slang words still."

"Let me tell you, Evelyn," rejoined D'Urbino, "that our Roman street fights are a mighty different thing altogether. It is the knife or the pistol with us, you remember."

"The pistol of course would be too much for me," replied Evelyn, "but as to the knife, I flatter myself that unless the scoundrel attacked me from behind, I should give an uncommonly good account of him before his steel had time to touch me."

"So you Englishmen boast, I know very well," replied D'Urbino, "but to tell you the honest truth, I have always taken the very great liberty of thinking—well, how shall I put it politely?—that there was some slight error in your calculations."

"There's a hang-dog looking villain skulking up that arch way," exclaimed Evelyn. "Just look at the fellow's scowl; it would delight me to operate upon that peculiarly ugly physiognomy, by way of convincing you of the efficacy of hard-hitting."

"*Gran Dio!*" cried D'Urbino, "you may have some such chance, I believe. There again! That's a pistol shot! Hark! there is another!"

"Why, my dear fellow." said Evelyn, stopping and looking D'Urbino full in the face, "you are trembling with excitement. You will never learn to practise straightforward hitting, unless you keep yourself perfectly cool."

"Coolness, I maintain," said D'Urbino, "is altogether an affair of climate and politics. It is easy to be cool under your freezing skies, and where every man is his own master. But don't you think we ought not to be leaving the Sandfords alone, if by any chance there should be rioting or fighting."

"Not for the world," cried Evelyn, instantly turning in a homeward direction.

They were just within sight of the Via Felice, when the movements of a person some distance before them attracted their notice.

"Whatever that gentleman is," remarked Evelyn, "he seems to find the neighbourhood of your house uncommonly agreeable. He

walks backwards and forwards in front of it, like a perturbed spirit."

D'Urbino looked astonished and annoyed, but made no reply.

"Who is your friend, D'Urbino?" asked Evelyn, noticing his companion's surprise. "Is he a tyrant, or a revolutionist? For you seem to cultivate *liaisons* with both sides, with a truly edifying impartiality. Of course you know the story of the man who invariably made a bow as he passed the statues of the old Pagan gods, on the ground that one never knows what is to happen, and the turn of those venerable idols might some day come round again."

"As I live, it is the Cameriere Rinaldo and no other;" replied D'Urbino, by no means disposed to relish his companion's rattling nonsense.

"Then we are in for some mystery, my dear friend," said Evelyn, "or fate will be more than usually unpropitious. After all there will be somebody to knock down,

depend upon it. Happily my biceps is in first rate condition. As a sculptor, D'Urbino, you ought to promote the cultivation of hard-hitting. It develops manly beauty quite wonderfully."

"I will model your arms with the utmost pleasure," rejoined D'Urbino, "but just at this moment, I prefer the solution of the mystery, as you call it."

As they came on, Rinaldo showed no wish to pass unrecognised.

"By Jove, he is on the look out for you," whispered Evelyn to D'Urbino, as Rinaldo first paused in his walk and then advanced to meet them. He did not stop, however, as they met, and made no sign of recognition except a slight motion of his head, indicating a desire that D'Urbino should remain behind.

Hesitating whether or not to comply, D'Urbino turned, as soon as he had passed, and perceived that Rinaldo was standing still and watching. An irresistible impulse

seized him, and bade him obey the summons.

"Walk slowly on," he whispered in Evelyn's ear; "in a moment I will be with you again."

"What on earth is the relation between our mysterious friend and this hot-headed D'Urbino?" thought Evelyn.

As he walked forward, Rinaldo advanced to meet D'Urbino, and in a hurried voice inquired what he was going to do with himself during the night.

The inquiry seemed impertinent, but D'Urbino thought it better to give a civil answer.

"We are returning to a friend's house," he said.

"English, or Roman?" asked Rinaldo.

"English," replied D'Urbino.

"Can you remain there till daylight?" Rinaldo continued.

"Impossible," said D'Urbino.

"Your friend is English?" inquired the other.

"He is."

"And to be trusted?'

"Absolutely."

"Then as you value your liberty, and perhaps your life, go home with him, and stir not out till morning."

"Signor Rinaldo, such a proceeding would be preposterous," said D'Urbino. "He would think me either a coward, a fool, or a madman."

"Let him think it," rejoined Rinaldo. "There will be mischief before night, and you ought to be neither abroad, nor in your own house."

"But in heaven's name what is it to you where I am?" exclaimed D'Urbino.

"Trouble yourself not about me and my affairs, D'Urbino," replied the other, "but abide by my warning."

"Why should I abide by it?" asked D'Urbino, with rising irritation. "Am I in your power, that you pretend to dictate to me where I am to pass my nights?"

"Not so much as I desire you should be," rejoined Rinaldo. "If you were absolutely in my power, neither you nor I would be out here this moment. Will you obey me this once more?" he asked again, with an intense earnestness that bewildered D'Urbino.

"I don't want to seem either a fool or a coward in my friend's eyes," said D'Urbino.

"Yet I know that you are neither the one nor the other," said Rinaldo, "and your friend will come to know the same."

"What in the name of heaven do you know about me?" D'Urbino replied, passionately.

"More than you know yourself," said Rinaldo.

"Will you promise me this one thing? Are your English friends men or women?"

"They are women. But why do you ask?"

"Because it will be a reasonable excuse for your remaining in their house to protect

them, in case of any disturbance in the streets."

"Then I must tell them that you expect one?" asked D'Urbino.

"You must not breathe my name before them," rejoined Rinaldo. "Surely you would not trust a woman with any serious secret."

"What secret?" asked D'Urbino.

"The secret that I have been in communication with you to-night."

"But my friend Evelyn has seen you. There he stands, watching and wondering how long you will keep me here."

"Bind him to secresy," said Rinaldo.

"Then he will want to learn what you have been saying."

"Doubtless he will. If he will pledge his honour to say nothing, you may tell him everything that has just passed between us. But for God's sake say nothing before any women."

And so saying, Rinaldo lifted his hat

with a courteous gesture, and walked rapidly away.

"Well," exclaimed Evelyn, when D'Urbino rejoined him, "has our friend been putting you through a catechetical examination in Machiavelli's complete works? There has been time enough for it; and here am I without a spark of fire to light another cigar. This comes of consorting with revolutionists and mad folks in general. Rome is utterly ruined, as I said before."

"He has given me permission to repeat all that he has told me," returned D'Urbino.

"Then in mercy hand me your matches before you begin, or I shall never survive to listen to the end of it," said Evelyn. "What a miserable specimen of Roman manufacture!" he continued, as he took the offered box. "My dear Urbino, it would be far more worthy of your gifts as an artist, if you would devote yourself to the improvement of conveniences for the

soothing work of smoking, and leave revolutions to meaner minds. But here is a light at last, thanks to my indomitable perseverance, so proceed with your reminiscences."

"Upon my word, my friend," he went on, as soon as D'Urbino had finished his account of the conversation, "the game is becoming quite exciting. Rely upon it, D'Urbino, this remarkable person has some object in view in thus benevolently superintending your daily life. Do you know that I really promise myself some pleasure in hunting out the old fox, and unearthing him, for the benefit of mankind in general, and of yourself in particular? Now if you could only provide me to-night with a stray assassin or two upon whose ugly faces I could experimentalise with my knuckles, I should feel perfectly refreshed and invigorated for the more crafty affair. Business first, you know we say in England, and pleasure afterwards; though, on the whole,

I think I should enjoy knocking over a few cut-throats more than ferreting out the most tempting of mystifications."

"You will think me a simpleton," replied D'Urbino; "but the conviction that this strange man is enclosing me in the meshes of some net or other, grows more unpleasant every day."

"Of course I don't ask you to say more than you perfectly like," said Evelyn; "but can you tell me, without reserve, whether you are or have been involved in any conspiracy or scheme against the government?"

"Without a shadow of reserve," said D'Urbino, "I can assure you that I am now involved in nothing. I have never concealed my principles, but what I have done has been done openly. Undoubtedly I have corresponded with men who are deeply involved, and they have sent me information from time to time which would compromise themselves without hope of escape. If Ri-

naldo is labouring to do me a mischief, it must be based on the lies of some of the hundreds of scoundrels who are ready at any moment to invent and swear to any falsehoods that their employers would pay for."

"Is it the government only that pays for the services of such scoundrels?" asked Evelyn.

"Far from it," rejoined D'Urbino; "it is the curse of the disaffection which results from tyranny, that it employs the vilest means to attain its best ends. But the blackest guilt is with those who make such vile means necessary, or at least apparently necessary."

"Possibly," replied Evelyn. "But now, what say you to turning in to our friends here? They ought to learn under what gallant guardianship they will be placed, in case your plotting gentry get up any serious riotings."

"Suppose then, we begin our duty by surveying the fortress on all sides, while we

finish a last cigar," said D'Urbino. "There is a knot of suspicious-looking houses in the rear of these buildings, which our amiable government treats to a domiciliary visit now and then, and I should like to see whether there are signs of anything going on there just now. And I should suggest that we stop talking until we are out again into the broad streets."

"Lead on! *mon general!* by all means," exclaimed Evelyn. And they entered the narrow passage which led them past the court-yards of Mrs. Sandford's and the adjoining houses.

They had not proceeded a score of paces, when Evelyn laid his hand on his companion's shoulder, and bade him halt.

"So far as this abominable darkness will let me see," he whispered, "there was something uncommonly like a man's head a moment ago showing itself above that wall. And the fellow that owns it disappeared at the sound of our footsteps."

"Whereabouts do you mean?" asked D'Urbino, in a whisper.

"Stay!" responded Evelyn, "here is surely some sort of a recess that we may hide in and watch the fellow's movements."

Cautiously feeling their way, the two men ensconced themselves in the opportune shelter.

"There it is once more!" whispered Evelyn. "Who lives in the house that the man is leaving?"

"Gracious heaven!" rejoined D'Urbino; "it is the mosaic-worker's house! And I heard this very day that he was going out for the night, and would leave Francesca alone, with only a woman servant besides."

"If the scoundrel is by himself," replied Evelyn, "I think we can make him give an account of himself, before a quarter of an hour is over, and a *mauvais quart d'heure* it shall be for him."

"And now, I recollect," replied D'Urbino, "he must come this way, whoever he is.

The other end of the lane was blocked up a few days ago."

"Hush, there he is again!" whispered Evelyn. "He is reassured, by heaven, and is on the top of the wall, and going to leap down."

As Evelyn spoke, the man let himself cautiously downwards, and was speedily safe upon the ground. Anxiously looking around, he was on the point of approaching the spot where they were watching him, when an uncontrollable cough seized Evelyn. The man heard the noise, was startled, and stood still.

"He will make a dash for it, and get away," cried D'Urbino, as Evelyn's coughing subsided. "It is now or never, for us and for him!"

So saying, he sprang from his concealment, followed by Evelyn, nothing loath. Not a word was uttered, but the fellow instantly turned and fled in the opposite direction, where as it happened, the light of the

stars was less impeded by lofty houses. In the haste of his flight he almost dashed himself against the unexpected barricade, but recovered himself and stood at bay against his advancing adversaries.

"If you are an honest man!" cried D'Urbino, "come forward and give an account of what you have been doing in Signor Giorgione's house."

The man refused to answer, and D'Urbino and Evelyn steadily but slowly continued to advance upon him.

"Answer, or we seize you and give you over to the police!" exclaimed Evelyn.

"Who are you?" replied the man, when they were within a few paces of the spot where he stood confronting them. "Who are you, that you should interfere in my affairs? Let me pass, or it will be the worse for you, I say."

"As I live, it is that scamp Donato," cried D'Urbino. "It is the voice of the scoundrel, and none other."

"Come nearer, if you dare," returned Donato, brandishing a formidable knife, which shone even in the feeble starlight.

In an instant Evelyn was upon him, and with a well-delivered blow on the right eye, laid the fellow in the dust. Before he could stir to defend himself, D'Urbino seized the hand in which he held his knife, while Evelyn wrenched away the weapon, and left the man prostrate and helpless.

"You believe in the biceps and the knuckle now, my dear D'Urbino, I trust," said Evelyn. "What a truly happy omen for the success of our proceedings in the matter of your incomprehensible friend."

"It was splendid and nothing less," rejoined D'Urbino, "and a feat worthy of a gladiator of the past. But at present we have to dispose of this scoundrel here. Come, Donato," he continued, keeping his eyes upon the ill-looking ruffian, "resistance is useless. You may as well confess at once what led you to that house to-night."

But for the surrounding obscurity, the crafty expression of the prostrate man's features would have suggested fresh suspicions to his questioner, as he quietly and sulkily replied, "The absence of the master of the house. But let me stand up, or I will answer you nothing."

"Stand up, then," said D'Urbino, "but take care that you make no attempt to get away, or you die on the spot with your own knife, remember."

"You confess, then," said Evelyn, "that you knew the master was away."

"Yes," said Donato, with a sneer; "but his daughter is at home."

"What does the scoundrel mean?" exclaimed D'Urbino, in a tone that implied an inclination to strike him once more to the ground.

"This English Signore will no doubt explain to the simple mind of Cavaliere D'Urbino what I mean," replied Donato, with another sneer.

"Be calm, my dear fellow, I entreat you," said Evelyn to D'Urbino, as the latter seized hold of Donato's arm, as if he would dash him down in his passionate indignation.

"Yes, Cavaliere, why not?" said Donato, "there is nothing very surprising in the fact that a gentleman should visit a young lady when the absence of her father sets her free to see her friends. I was not aware that the friendship between the lady and Signor D'Urbino was of so intimate a kind that he had a right to warn off all other intruders."

"Curse the scoundrel's insolence!" cried D'Urbino; "I would strike you to the heart, if I gave you what you deserved. I know this man of old, Evelyn," he added; "he is one of the blackest liars in Rome. There is not a syllable of truth in what he is saying."

"I have not the faintest doubt as to that matter," said Evelyn. "Nevertheless, I propose to question him a little further.

Come now, my friend, if so I may call you, after administering that necessary blow to your countenance, and which I suspect is already making the vision of one of your eyes rather imperfect, suppose you satisfy our reasonable curiosity."

"What right have you to interfere, I say, Signore?" growled Donato. "What is it to you what girls I visit?"

"I do not happen to have the pleasure of the personal acquaintance of the Signorina Francesca—"

"Signorina Francesca!" interrupted the fellow. "Who told you that she has a right to such a title?"

"Be so good as not to break in upon my words," continued Evelyn. "I am not personally acquainted with the young lady, but I have friends who are much interested in her welfare."

"Gentlemen, or ladies?" asked the impudent fellow.

"Evelyn!" cried D'Urbino. "I can stand

this no longer. We must drive the scoundrel before us till we come across the police."

"Patience, Signore," said Donato, in a less insolent tone. "I think I heard the English gentleman mention the name of Signor Rinaldo. Is he a friend of yours, Signor Ingles?"

"Is he a friend of yours? I might ask in reply," said Evelyn.

"I have the honour of his acquaintance," replied Donato, to Evelyn's astonishment; "and if you are engaged in any occupation for his advantage, I shall be happy to mention it to him when he next calls upon me."

"You will be in the galleys before that time, Donato!" exclaimed D'Urbino. "Of that be well assured."

"I have been nearer the scaffold than I am now to the galleys," rejoined Donato, "as Signor D'Urbino knows very well."

"Whatever you are coming to by and bye," said Evelyn, "answer me this now.

Can you prove that you were not in Giorgione's house for the purpose of theft?"

"Search me from head to foot," was the man's instant reply, "and see if I have any thing but a few bajocchi about me. Besides, what is there worth stealing in Giorgione's possession?"

"My dear Evelyn," answered D'Urbino, "this Donato is known to be a scamp more fertile in lies and trickery than any other scoundrel in all Rome. He is tempting us off the scent by these infamous insinuations. When we have him in the police office, he may be searched, but we shall be as much in the dark as ever."

"Forward, then, to that same place of enlightenment," replied Evelyn, "we have been quite long enough in this dismal hole already."

CHAPTER X.

AT THE BARRACKS.

When they emerged into the brighter light of the Piazza di Spagna, Donato's heart sank within him, and all hope of escape vanished, as the clank of sabres, and the firm tread of soldiers, struck upon his ear. A shout from Evelyn and D'Urbino at once drew the attention of the officer in command, and the loud cry of "halt!" announced the success of the call for aid. A few quick strides forwards, and a brief explanation from Donato's captors consigned the baffled rogue to the safer custody of a dozen carbineers, and the whole party at once marched off to the nearest barracks.

As it happened, Colonel Bastiani, an officer holding a high post in the service of the Governor of Rome, had just arrived on urgent business, and Donato was at once brought before him for examination. Evelyn and D'Urbino described all the circumstances of his capture, fully expecting that they would sustain the charge of burglary, or of some equally illegal act, which would warrant the detention of Donato until an official inquiry could be instituted into the details of the case. Much to their chagrin, neither Colonel Bastiani nor any other of the officers present could see the affair in the same light in which it struck them.

"Surely," said Bastiani, in reply to Evelyn's confident assertion that Donato must have entered Giorgione's house with some criminal intent; "surely you have lived long enough in the world to be aware that you have brought no evidence to rebut this man's account of himself. However, the man demands to be searched, as a proof that

he has stolen nothing. If nothing is found upon him, we must let him go. We have so many serious affairs on hand, that I can hardly burden myself with investigating every trumpery private escapade. Sergeant," he continued, "take the man into another room, and have him thoroughly searched."

The order was immediately obeyed, and before D'Urbino and Evelyn could make up their minds what next to do in this unexpected turn of affairs, Donato was brought back, with an insulting leer upon his countenance. Nothing whatsoever, except a few bajocchi, was found upon him.

"Well, gentlemen," said Bastiani, "I see nothing for it but to dismiss the charge."

"But, Eccellenza," broke in Donato himself, "am I to receive no compensation for being seized as a thief by two persons who were loitering about for their own secret purposes? What was it to them if I chose to pay a visit to a pretty girl of my acquain-

tance, and to leave the house at the back instead of the front? Does this busy body of an Englishman pretend that he never did anything of the kind himself."

A general titter at Evelyn's expense ran through the assembled soldiers, and Colonel Bastiani could not refrain from a smile.

"The man is an infernal liar, Colonel!" exclaimed D'Urbino passionately.

"Perhaps Signor D'Urbino," observed Donato, "will inform his excellency why it is that he is so jealous of the reputation of the young lady whose father is not at home at present," and he turned to D'Urbino with an insulting sneer.

"When this affair is cleared up," whispered Evelyn to D'Urbino," I would cheerfully thrash this vagabond within an inch of his life."

"Then I think I may now order the discharge," continued Bastiani, taking no notice of the interruption.

"Pardon me, Colonel!" interposed an

officer who had entered the room while the conversation was going on, and who had been closely scrutinising Donato's features, "may I ask for a moment's delay in setting this man at liberty?"

So saying the new comer advanced to the table at which Bastiani was sitting, and addressed to him a few words in a tone inaudible to the others. The Colonel listened attentively, and the whole aspect of his countenance changed. In place of the manifestly unwilling attention with which he had heard the charge brought by D'Urbino and Evelyn, his anxiety to master the details of the information he was now receiving showed itself in every line of his features. Presently the officer who furnished the information drew out a leathern case from his pocket, and from among a number of other papers produced a list of names, which he and Bastiani examined carefully together. As soon as he was satisfied, the result of the conference appeared.

"Arrest the man Donato," he exclaimed, and two soldiers immediately placed their hands on the trembling scoundrel's shoulders.

"Cavaliere D'Urbino," continued Bastiani, "I must request you to consider yourself detained."

D'Urbino started, but bowed his assent to the order.

"There is no need of secrecy in the matter," continued Bastiani, "this Donato is the convict who was rescued on his way to execution, as everybody recollects, though it seems that none of us knew his features until Captain Palma came in."

"At first I hardly recognised him myself," replied Palma. "That eye of his looks as if it had been disfigured rather unpleasantly, and I should say that his whole face and hair had been singed with fire."

"He professes to have just come fresh from a love affair," observed the Colonel.

"Then he must have been embracing a goddess whose glances are more than metaphorical flames of fire."

Every eye was turned on the miserable wretch, whose fate seemed now settled beyond hope of reversal.

"I don't think the fellow will cheat the gallows again," continued Palma, "especially now that we have learnt how he got off before. That confraternity of praying folks has been pretty well purged of confederates with the traitors by this time."

"So that was the way the villain got off!" exclaimed D'Urbino, in such apparent sincerity that both Bastiani and Palma looked at him with surprise.

"You are aware of course, Signor D'Urbino," replied the Colonel, "that you are charged with aiding and abetting in this man's rescue from the hands of justice."

"Most unjustly, Colonel!" rejoined D'Urbino angrily, "if it be so."

"Surely it is rather too late," replied

Bastiani, "to deny that you took a part in the scuffle in which this man was wrapped in the cloak of one of the confraternity, and so escaped."

"Till this moment, Colonel," replied D'Urbino, "I was in utter ignorance as to the device by which he got away. I certainly spread about some preposterous story about a miracle, because I thought the man was a victim to the vindictiveness of our fatherly priesthood. But that is all."

"I am not here to discuss the system of the government of his holiness," retorted the Colonel, who, in truth, was one of that rather numerous class of Romans, who love neither the priesthood nor the republicans, but choose to put down the latter, in the interests of what they call order.

"You cannot be surprised," he added, "at learning that your name is on the list of the suspected."

"I can well believe it," replied D'Urbino, gravely.

A slight movement among the soldiers and officers present, announced another arrival.

"By Jove! D'Urbino," whispered Evelyn to his friend, "here is your *angelo custode* or *diavolo custode*, or whatever he really is, once more. Ten to one it will be 'Rinaldo to the rescue,' before you can count a hundred."

Rinaldo's countenance wore its usual grave and sad composure, but he gave the friends no time for speculation as to the object he had in view in presenting himself. He came forward and took a seat by Colonel Bastiani's side. Bastiani simply placed the documents he had been examining before him, pointing to one or two passages with his finger, and casting a glance at D'Urbino as he did so. Rinaldo's reply could not be heard, but it led to a brief conversation, which resulted in an intimation from Bastiani to D'Urbino, that he was to consider himself at liberty.

"Mephistopheles to wit!" exclaimed Evelyn to his friend, when the welcome information reached his ear.

But before D'Urbino could answer him, the whole room was startled by a sudden cry from the wretched Donato, who sprang forward and threw himself at the feet of Rinaldo, and implored him for the love of God, to intercede for him with Colonel Bastiani.

"Grant me only one moment with Signor Rinaldo in private," cried the cringing miscreant, appealing to Colonel Bastiani, as Rinaldo gave no sign of heeding his prayers. "Eccellenza! eccellenza!" he exclaimed, seeking to move the stern-looking soldier. "I have secret information to give you, that will atone for all my past offences. Spare me, for the love of God, and persuade Signor Rinaldo only to listen to me once more. If I can only speak to him, you will never repent the mercy you show me."

Shrugging his shoulders and lifting up

his eyebrows at the vehemence of the appeal, Bastiani turned to Rinaldo and observed that there could be no harm in hearing what the man had to say; and most unwillingly Rinaldo rose to lead the way into an adjoining chamber, determined at the same time to bring the interview to an end, with all possible speed. He had that very morning received a note from Naples, which induced him to resolve upon defying both the threats and entreaties which he expected that Donato would pour out upon him. The note was so brief that every word of it was imprinted upon his memory.

"I have every hope," wrote Noel; "indeed it amounts to a certainty, that before very long the information you have asked for will be placed in your hands for communication to the friend on whose behalf you wrote to me."

"The villain may now do his worst," thought Rinaldo to himself, as after once

more reflecting upon this intelligence, he bade Donato lose no time in telling his story, if he really had one to tell. It was as Rinaldo had expected. He had no information to communicate, which was not either palpably false, or long ago in the possession of the government officials. His sole aim was to bargain with Rinaldo for the document on which the latter set so strange a value, on fresh and largely diminished terms, coupled only with the condition that Rinaldo should use his influence with the government authorities in remission of the capital sentence still hanging over his head. In vain he urged his entreaties, and lowered his price, as Rinaldo steadily refused to enter into any bargain whatsoever. At length the miserable wretch gave up all hope of any payment in money, however trifling; and offered to produce the missing paper at any time that Rinaldo should appoint, on the sole condition that he would guarantee him his life. But Rinaldo was immovable.

"I care nothing for your threats," he said, with a calmness that contrasted wonderfully with the anxiety with which he had always hitherto discussed the terms which Donato exacted. "I am no longer in your power; and as to saving you from the executioner, I have no influence which would put off your death for a single day. Whether you deserve death or not, is nothing to me. I advise you to prepare for death."

"Then I will have my revenge before I die," cried Donato, his odious countenance gleaming with fury; "and this is the beginning of it?"

As he spoke, he seized a wooden stool that stood close at hand, and struck at Rinaldo with all the force of frustrated hatred and savage blood-thirstiness.

Totally unprepared for the attack, Rinaldo was able to guard himself only so far as to raise one of his arms to protect his head. As it was, the blow meant for his forehead, and which would probably have been fatal,

was diverted to his shoulder, while its actual force was materially diminished. With a loud cry for help, he threw himself upon his enemy, but would have been speedily overpowered had not the door been instantly thrown open, and the soldiers rushed in.

The story of the assault was soon told, and Donato, handcuffed and watched by a couple of men with fixed bayonets ready to run him through at the first attempt to escape, fell upon the floor, giving way to the shameless tears and groans in which Italians of his type are wont to indulge at times of disappointment and baffled revenge.

Prompted by a feeling more spontaneous than the dictates of ordinary civility, both Evelyn and D'Urbino at once offered their condolences to Rinaldo, and expressed their detestation of Donato's attempt on his life with a warmth which called up a glow of pleasure upon his pale sad features.

"The blow is nothing at all," he said, in reply to their expressions of hope that he

was not dangerously hurt. "But I shall not be sorry to have the advantage of your company as long as our roads home lie in the same direction."

A polite inquiry from Colonel Bastiani as to the quarter of the city where Evelyn and D'Urbino lived, was followed by an instruction to the officer who would now take charge of Donato, and lodge him in prison, to escort them to their several homes.

"It is as well to be on the safe side," he added, as they protested against being unable to take care of themselves.

"We have the most reliable information that something serious is to be attempted before daybreak, and unless you are burning for a fight, I recommend you for once to put yourselves under military orders."

All rights of personal dignity thus happily reserved, the whole party started without further delay. It was, indeed, not a night for peace-loving folks to be abroad at all. They had proceeded scarcely the length

of a street when the boom of cannon swept along the cold night air, followed immediately by a second more distant roar.

"Saint Angelo! as I live!" exclaimed D'Urbino to his companions. "I know the sound too well; and," he added, in a whisper to Evelyn, "I hate it with all my soul!"

"What say you, Captain Palma?" asked Evelyn, addressing the officer in command of the escort. "Are those really the guns of Saint Angelo? and what does it mean?"

"It means fighting," replied Palma, "and nothing less, or possibly it may be meant to show that we are alive to everything, or it may be a signal agreed upon between the various officers who have the peace of the city in their charge."

As he spoke a rocket rose high in the air, at a considerable distance before them; and the murmurs of the roaring of a far-off multitude were wafted faintly upon their ears. Instinctively the whole party hastened their

pace, without waiting for Captain Palma's word of command.

"Halt!" he cried nevertheless, with the intention of listening to the distant sounds, undisturbed by the tramp of his own men. The wind, too, was rising, and made it more difficult to form any trustworthy surmise as to the extent and exact position of the rioting or fighting, which had plainly begun. The gusty gales which began to sweep along the streets, and whirled in eddies around the many piazzas of the city, sighed, moaned, and whistled, drowning the murmurs which rose from the distant points, where it seemed that a struggle had actually begun. During each temporary lull, however, it was easy to detect the shouts of angry men in conflict, and the experienced ear of Palma himself disentangled the sharp, clear cries of soldiery from amidst the confused noises of half-disciplined bands of insurgents.

Giving the word again to march, Captain Palma enjoined the strictest silence, as he led

the way towards the Via Felice, intending to make for D'Urbino's house as his first point, and thence to escort D'Urbino and Evelyn to Mrs. Sandford's. They were just leaving the Via della Fontanella, and were passing into the Corso with the view of marching southwards, intending to avoid as far as possible the darker and more desolate streets, when a roll of musketry resounded along the comparatively wide thoroughfare of the Corso, and immediately afterwards a blaze of light burst from the directly opposite direction, followed by a roar and a crash.

"Halt!" again cried Captain Palma. "The scoundrels are at the old game again down there. You are having a taste of the ways of our cowardly rebels, Mr. Evelyn; do you know what that flash and that report signify?"

"An explosion, I take it," replied Evelyn; "you seem to have a liking for all sorts of abnormal and heretical military operations

here nowadays. But what is it that has been blown up, do you suppose?"

"You seem to take it coolly, my friend," Captain Palma replied, not particularly pleased at Evelyn's bantering tones. "Probably it is the post-office these villains are attacking."

"Rather a needless expenditure of powder, is it not?" responded Evelyn, with the same provoking indifference at which Palma inwardly chafed, and D'Urbino, with all the seriousness of his pent-up anger, could not help a smile. "If report says true," Evelyn continued, "it would be much cheaper to buy over the post-office officials. By the way, what is the price of a Cardinal Secretary of State? Have you ever heard? Or does the tariff of official honesty in Rome follow a sliding scale, like the corn-tax in England in the old protectionist days?"

"It is not plunder that the scoundrels want," retorted Palma, more angry than he chose to allow to appear, conscious as he was

of the accessibility to bribes, which pervades nearly the entire administrative system of Rome. "What they want is to terrify the police and the priesthood, and to harass the garrison with repeated attacks on undefended places, so that the only men who can keep order are at their wits' ends. Don't take me for a worshipper of the purple, I beg you. And now, my men, forward once more."

Hardly were they in motion again, when the whistle of a bullet announced the reality of the fighting that had begun in the Piazza del Popolo, whence the first roll of musketry had proceeded.

"By heavens!" cried Palma, "that comes from a rifle, and that rifle is in the hands of one of the rioters."

"Pleasant, undoubtedly," observed Evelyn, still so undisturbed, as to irritate the fiery-tempered young Captain still more. "Pray explain how you came to that conclusion."

"It was no stray shot from the wretched

old carbines, which are the only pieces the government allows us soldiers. I know the whistle of these new guns tolerably well by this time; and besides, if the shot had come from our men, we should have had more samples of the volley."

Another such a bullet, and then another, came whistling by, and roused not only Captain Palma, but the whole party, to that species of frenzy which seizes upon troops when they are under fire of an invisible enemy.

"Those are not chance rifle-shots, sergeant!" said Captain Palma to the non-commissioned officer who was with him. "Those bullets are meant for us, without any mistake whatever. We must turn and seize the cowardly ruffians. Now, men, forwards; and take care that that rogue in the handcuffs does not get away."

Eager to catch their unseen enemies, the soldiers rushed forwards at a pace which Palma could with difficulty so far restrain

as to prevent the advance from growing into an irregular race, when a fresh blaze of light from the Piazza del Popolo, revealed the presence of a small knot of men immediately before them, standing in the middle of the Corso. A rifle-flash immediately afterwards told that it was this small group who were making the soldiers a mark for their balls, and as the unfortunate sergeant fell to the ground, shot through the body, no further proof was needed to show the increasing accuracy of their aim.

"Cut them down—every man among them!" shouted Palma, as his soldiers dashed onwards furiously. But the order was not obeyed, for the reason that the riflemen dispersed among the various narrow streets opening upon the Corso from the right and from the left, and were lost in the darkness, unillumined even by the dismal glimmer of the old-fashioned oil-lamps of the past.

"Yes!" exclaimed Palma, bitterly, as he

drew his men together. "It is all of a piece. They give us carbines not fit for duck shooting in their marshes, and then they set us to hunt for rebels in the dark. Come, gentlemen," he added, as Rinaldo, Evelyn, and D'Urbino, in company with the terrified Donato, came up to the disappointed soldiers, "it is useless lingering here. Be so good as to follow me. And now, first for the Via Felice."

CHAPTER XI.

THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE.

Taught by the experience just acquired, Captain Palma thought it right to adopt a more strictly military precaution against surprise, and ordered one of his men to proceed some twenty or thirty paces in advance of his small force,—a decision all the more necessary now that they were on the point of passing through some of the darkest and narrowest streets of the neighbourhood. He enjoined also the strictest silence on his convoy of civilians, hoping thus to escape recognition by any of the insurgent party whom they might chance to encounter.

It was not long before the wisdom of his precaution was manifest. A call from the man in advance announced an alarm of an unexpected kind. The pavement of the street was found to be broken up, and though no obstacle was thus presented to the passing of foot soldiers, the hindrance to their rapid march would cause a delay in their movements, favourable to the plans of any determined men who sought an encounter with them. The Roman pavements are at all times bad enough, and when the huge and unshaped lumps of stone, which satisfy the population in the daylight and in times of quiet, are tumbled together in utter confusion, all transit in the dark must needs be slow and insecure.

The object of the delay now caused was not long a mystery. As the soldiers were blundering along, muttering imprecations against the service they were engaged in, the lights of a couple of large dark lanterns were flashed across their faces, by men whose

persons it was of course impossible to recognise. Before they could do more than stare uselessly into the obscurity, the men had disappeared, apparently into a narrow lane, into which it would have been folly and rashness to pursue them. If their object had been to ascertain the numbers of the soldiery, or the character of the civilians in their charge, it could not be doubted that the inquirers had satisfied themselves, and would perhaps be seen no more. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to proceed without further investigation, especially as the extent of the disturbed pavement proved to be far from large.

Scarcely, however, were they on the march again, when a shout of "Who goes there?" rang around them. Without waiting for the word of command, the soldiers instinctively stood still.

"Who goes there?—I desire to know," the voice repeated in loud and angry tones. And a tall personage walked rapidly to-

wards the party, and asked for the officer in command.

Captain Palma presented himself, and so far as the obscurity permitted, perceived that the person who spoke wore the usual costume of the Prelates attached to the Papal Household. The voice was strange to him, and it was all but impossible to detect any portion of the man's features; but though Palma was far from familiar with the many officials of the Vatican, he would not assume, without hesitation, that the man was what he appeared to be.

"May I ask who you are that pretend to stop the soldiers of his Holiness in the execution of their duty?" he asked, without an attempt at conciliation.

"If you will present yourself at the rooms of Monsignor Berardi to-morrow morning, Captain Palma," replied the other, "you will ascertain who I am. In the mean time, you may use your own discretion in informing me on what duty you

are engaged, or in refusing the information."

"I am answerable to my own superiors alone," retorted Palma, "and I must insist upon your placing no hindrance in my way. Push this gentleman aside," he added, turning to the man nearest to him, "unless he moves off of his own accord."

"You will dare to do nothing of the kind, my friend," rejoined the other; and without paying more heed to what Palma had said, he called aloud to some unseen companions or followers to come forward with their aid. Without, however, waiting for their arrival, he himself strode away in the direction of the Corso, and disappeared.

Once more moving forwards, and expecting every moment to encounter the Monsignore's attendants, Palma and his men advanced along the Via Felice without further molestation. As they emerged into the wider thoroughfare, Evelyn ventured

on a suggestion to the impatient young officer.

"Pardon a civilian's intrusion," he said; "but do you not suspect that this same Monsignore is an impostor, and that his only object was to gain delay?"

"Humph!" growled Palma, too much irritated to think any longer about civility.

"That shouting of his to his imaginary servants was all a feint, I am satisfied," he continued. "You military gentlemen, I am aware, think little of the brains of us ignorant civilians; but if the affair of the broken pavement and the talk of this pretended prelate are not parts of one scheme for hindering your progress, my name is not Charles Evelyn."

"We shall see," rejoined Palma, gruffly.

By this time they were nearly at D'Urbino's door, while D'Urbino was debating within himself whether or not he should see Rinaldo safely to his lodgings, and take his own chance for a safe return afterwards.

Rinaldo had taken his arm for support, saying that the increasing pain caused by Donato's savage blow was producing a very disagreeable sensation of faintness; and he hardly liked to leave a man to whom, in all probability, he owed his present personal liberty, to the care of strangers, or to impose upon Evelyn a duty which might be unwelcome and dangerous.

His debating, however, was rudely brought to an end. The street which until now was totally deserted, in a moment swarmed with a crowd of armed men. From every corner and adjacent place of concealment they dashed forward and attacked the handful of carbineers.

"Seize them all!" shouted a personage with a mask over the lower part of his face, "and set free the man we want first of all."

"Never!" cried Palma, "unless you shoot me through the body to reach him." And so saying, he rushed to the spot where

Donato stood, thrust the hand-cuffed wretch back against the nearest wall, and bade the soldiers make sure that he should not take to flight. Then planting himself in front of the prisoner, he defied his assailants sword in hand.

"Stand back, I tell you!" shouted the man in the mask, "and let me settle the affair of this accursed Palma! Captain Palma, I know you of old, and you know me also, and I have sworn to have your life, you bloodthirsty infernal villain!"

Awed by the voice of their leader, the assailants obeyed him, many of them remembering the oath that he had sworn, in return for the relentless severity with which Palma had on a former occasion chastised the people of a disaffected district, where this man's family were living, and where they were among the chief sufferers from the cruelty of the soldiery.

"Blood for blood, Captain Palma," he added, drawing a pistol from his belt.

"That bullet is for the black heart that spared not my dying father's life," he cried, pointing the weapon with deliberate aim. He deliberated too long, however, for a blow from Palma's sword beat down his arm at the very moment that he fired, and the bullet, glancing past Palma himself, struck one of the men who were holding Donato in their grasp, and so far helped to set their captive free.

Instantly recovering himself, Palma's assailant next attacked him with the sword, and the weapons of the two men flashed wildly in the starlight, as they struck and lunged at one another with deadly hate and passion. They were not unequally matched, both in height and skill, but Palma's temper was cooler than that of his enraged adversary, who was still further agitated by the failure of his pistol-shot. Both the soldiers and the insurgents watched the fight with all the savage interest of men long used to bloody acts, and thoroughly capable of ap-

preciating the chances of a well-fought duel.

Blood at length began to flow from a slight cut in Palma's forehead, and trickling into his eyes obscured his sight. Furious at the thought that he would thus be rendered powerless, alike to fight and to defend himself, he struck one more violent and headlong blow at his enemy, and then closed with him, intending to hurl him to the ground. His own weapon snapped asunder like glass, but before the other could recover himself for a final blow, Palma's arms were around him, and the two fell together in a deadly struggle. At first it was doubtful with whom the victory would remain, but the masked man bethought himself of the knife that is rarely absent from persons of his class and occupation, and a groan from the unhappy Palma told how fatal was the stroke with which it pierced his breast.

Quick as lightning the struggle was re-

newed between the soldiers and the rioters. Shots were fired, and knives, daggers, and swords, gleamed in maddest confusion. The ordinary discipline of the soldiery vanished and gave way to panic as the overpowering numbers of the mob made themselves felt. Such as were still unhurt or only slightly wounded, fled in every direction; while it was impossible to tell among the bodies that lay prostrate on the ground, who were alive and who were dead, and how many on either side were among them. Evelyn, D'Urbino, and Rinaldo, were hopelessly separated, and each of the three knew not whether the others had not been shot or cut down in the fray.

Evelyn was the first to learn the fate that awaited him.

"You are an Englishman, Signor," said the masked leader. "How came you among these cut-throat soldiers?"

"Certainly not by my own free will, my friend," rejoined Evelyn; "and I trust you will now permit me to go my way unmolested."

"It was he that gave me up to the wretch Palma," cried a voice near him, which Evelyn at once recognised as that of the liberated Donato.

"My friend in the mask, with whose name I am not acquainted," observed Evelyn, "if you know anything of that person who has spoken, you will agree with me that he is the greatest liar in all Rome."

"And out of it, into the bargain," rejoined the leader of the rioters, with a bitter sneer, "nevertheless, Signor Englishman, I cannot let you go. You will show that English good sense which you make such boast of, by coming with me, and not compelling me to force you."

"Fear nothing, friend," replied Evelyn; "you surely don't take me for a madman. Only be so good as to inform me whither you intend me to follow you."

"I have heard of your English *sang froid* many times," rejoined the other, as he and the insurgents about him moved onwards

at a rapid pace, "but upon my word you are a more confoundedly cool sample than I ever could dream of."

"That may be," retorted Evelyn; "at any rate you Romans have not yet acquired the accomplishment, for I find your city in a perfect storm of passion at present. But just now the question is where you are taking me."

"You will know sooner than you like," replied the other, "so you may as well know at once. I suppose you have heard of the Roman National Committee?"

"What? the secret clique that rules all you hot-headed revolutionists, and destroys the peace and enjoyment of the age?"

"You take it mightily coolly," returned the man. "Are you aware of the power this committee wields, and that at their command you might be placed in a most unpleasant predicament."

"Are the members of this government of yours fools, or are they not?" asked Evelyn,

perfectly undisturbed, and offering his captor a cigar.

"Do you think that if they were fools," replied the man, quietly accepting the cigar, "they would go on year after year, keeping their own counsel, and directing the proceedings of fiery savages such as I am?"

"Then make yourself easy as to what they will do with a peaceable Englishman like myself," said Evelyn. "As to this Donato and his story, if your committee gentlemen are not fools, they must be well aware that he is a mendacious scoundrel at the very least."

"And you intend to talk to them as you talk to me?" inquired the man, in a tone which implied that such daring was incredible and impossible.

"Of course," said Evelyn, "why not?"

"Are all Englishmen like you?" asked his captor, unable to master his bewilderment, "for if they are, I should like uncommonly to see a few more specimens of the race."

"By no means," rejoined Evelyn: "a good many of them show their sense by not coming to this uncomfortable city of yours in the hope of finding peace and quietness."

"Humph!" grunted the other, "they say all Englishmen are mad, and I begin to believe them."

"Yes," said Evelyn. "I am aware of your eccentricities in this respect. The first thing I heard when I first came to Rome, was the polite information that none but Englishmen and mad dogs go out in the sunshine in summer. But now how long is it to be before I make the acquaintance of this committee of yours?"

"Here is the house where they are sitting," replied the man, entering a decent looking building, without any pretence at mystification, and bidding the crowd that had accompanied them disperse to their homes.

Within the house a few men were loung-

ing about smoking, talking, and reading, so far as the glimmer of a few ill-trimmed lamps allowed Evelyn to see what was around him. He himself was at once conducted across a courtyard to a separate house, where his captor in the mask was joined by a person of a higher style of dress and manner, to whom, after some private conversation, he was consigned for introduction to the formidable Roman Committee, concerning whom so much is said and written, and of whom so little is really known by the world in general.

He found the Committee, or rather, some few members of it, sitting in a room of moderate dimensions, furnished much after the fashion of an ordinary Roman salon, with the addition of a curtain of light texture drawn across the middle so that the occupants of the inner part were invisible to those who were on the outer side. The inner portion was not actually in darkness, but the lamps were so placed

and shaded as to throw no light upon the countenances of the persons within, while the outer portion was abundantly illuminated by lamps of its own.

Evelyn's conductor offered him a chair and then seated himself.

"You speak Italian, Signore?" asked the man.

"I have that happiness," replied Evelyn, "but why do you ask?"

"Because there is no one here to-night, who speaks English, and in that case we might have to detain you till the morning."

"And how long do you mean to deprive me of my personal freedom, as it is, may I ask?" continued Evelyn.

"You will excuse my declining all conversation, Signore. I fear we shall have to wait a while, before our committee can proceed with your examination."

"Then I may as well record upon the tablets of my memory the various particulars of this interesting apartment, for the

benefit of any friends," remarked Evelyn. "Of course you won't mind smoking and listening, while I smoke and talk." And he propitiated his companion with one of his best cigars.

"Well," he went on, "here is certainly a most unexpected experience added to my previous stores of knowledge. And really so far you seem a very civilised set of people after all. Nothing but that absurd-looking curtain to hide the terrible monsters who are doubtless waiting on the other side with all the correct apparatus of horror and cruelty. What is to be the next step, I wonder? Is the veil to be drawn asunder, to terrify my scared senses with the sight of the orthodox machinery well known to be in favour with secret societies? You are of course aware, my silent friend, what tales are told about you Roman conspirators. They say you take horrid oaths, and I fancy I have heard of your pricking your own flesh and drinking your own blood, by way of enter-

ing into a compact with the devil; though why the devil should have a taste for such an utterly useless ceremony I never could comprehend."

"They tell atrocious lies," Evelyn's companion suddenly broke in.

"I am glad to hear you deny the soft impeachment," returned Evelyn, "not that I ever believed that either you or your friend the devil could ever be possessed with the amazing stupidity that people attribute to conspirators of all sorts, whether mortal or infernal. However—"

He was cut short by the entrance of D'Urbino, in charge of another attendant upon the National Committee.

"D'Urbino!" exclaimed Evelyn, when the new comers were seated, "You can't imagine how agreeably I am so far disappointed in the ways of this mysterious association you all seem so much afraid of."

Before D'Urbino could reply, a hand-

bell sounded on the other side of the room, and without waiting for an injunction to keep silence Evelyn thought it best to hold his tongue.

"Your name is, I think, Evelyn," asked a voice from behind the curtain.

"Such is my name," replied he.

"We must apologize to you, Signore," continued the voice, "for placing this veil between yourself and us. It is only a necessary precaution to prevent your recognising us, if we should meet in society. And it further relieves you from the temptation to describe our persons elsewhere."

"Therein," replied Evelyn, "you exemplify the wisdom of the saying that charity begins at home, and at the same time you act charitably towards myself. Gentlemen, proceed."

"You are aware that we have a very difficult and also perilous work in hand," responded the voice.

"And also in some respects a most pre-

posterous and insane one," interrupted Evelyn.

"I don't understand you, Signore," said the voice, "we hoped that we had your sympathy."

"The deuce you did, my good fellow?" exclaimed Evelyn. "Do you suppose that a man who values a quiet life can have any sympathy with proceedings which keep a man out of his bed all night, and make him the unwilling witness of such hideous blood-shedding as I have just been seeing."

"You saw Captain Palma put to death, I presume;" said the voice.

"I certainly saw him stabbed by a man in a mask, who owned that he did it for personal revenge, if you call that a putting to death," rejoined Evelyn; "why in the world can't you conduct your revolutions through more reputable agencies?"

"Signor Evelyn," another voice interposed, "you speak like a child. Do you not see that revolutions, when justifiable,

are brought on by the perpetration of crimes against a helpless people individually, and when we employ as our agents men who have personally suffered from a brutal despotism, we are merely acting in the true spirit of justifiable resistance. If the whole people rises against a tyrant, you rose-water critics applaud; if a single man happens to be stung to revenge by intolerable cruelties you call it assassination. I do not myself see the difference."

"Well, well," replied Evelyn, "perhaps you are right. "But you will admit that you do employ the very dirtiest tools sometimes. There is that scoundrel Donato, for instance. They say he is in your pay."

"Probably Donato is all you say of him, but we are not now discussing his character," replied voice number two. "What would you have us do? Are your friends, the clericals, one whit more particular in their choice of agents? Is any existing government more particular? I have been

in your country myself, and I ask you as an honest man, is your government, and are the various sources of power in your country, at all fastidious about the honesty or reputation of the agencies they make use of?"

"Really I fail to comprehend your argument," said Evelyn, "so far as it concerns the sources of power in England."

"When I was in London, Signor Evelyn," continued the same speaker, "I was admitted behind the scenes of your journalist system, and I put it to you, without specifying the names of your newspapers, whether nine-tenths of what is written with a view to influence legislation or to effect personal reputations, is not the work of men who are simply hired and paid for it, and who have no more remorse in assailing what is good, and in stabbing a man's fair fame for money, than this wretched Donato has in selling his slanders to either side amongst us Romans? Come, Signore," he

continued, "I can see you, though you cannot see me, and by your looks I am satisfied that you agree with me. Of course we are not going to detain you, but we shall not regret the mistake which brought you here, if it induces you to place our conduct in a fairer light among your friends. You are, I am told, an acquaintance of Signor D'Urbino, to whom we must now put a few questions. He will tell you that the Roman National Committee no more desires blood for its own sake than does your English House of Commons."

Adding a few civil words, Evelyn's questioner next addressed himself to D'Urbino. They were extremely guarded, while D'Urbino's replies were equally ample and open. On neither side was there an attempt at concealing the fact, that the sculptor's increasing acquaintanceship with Rinaldo was becoming matter of notoriety, and was causing suspicion as to the sincerity of his liberalism in politics. But what perplexed

Evelyn was the circumstance that D'Urbino took it for granted that he was not to be brought face to face with his examiners. His curiosity at length overcame his discretion, and taking advantage of a pause in the conversation, he broke in with an expression of his surprise that the same precautions were kept up in D'Urbino's case as were naturally desirable in his own.

"There is nothing inexplicable in the matter, Signore," replied the voice that had first addressed him. "It is only by making known the identity of the members of the National Committee to an extremely small number, even of strong Liberals, that we could work our system. You foreigners are apt to imagine that it is by a hideous machinery of oaths and terrorism that we carry out our aims, or rather try to carry them out. On the contrary, it is infinitely more by tact, secrecy, and a knowledge of human nature that we trust finally to succeed."

"Yes," added the second voice, "I would suggest to you foreign critics to place no credit in the monstrous stories you are told about the devilish personal crimes perpetrated either by us or by our enemies now in power. We hate the government of the priesthood, and only live in the hope of rooting it out from our country; but if it rested only on the personal unscrupulousness of popes, cardinals, and priests, it would tumble to pieces in a moment, and so with us. If we were what the priests represent us, do you suppose that we could go on holding our own year after year, in the face of their own tremendous power? No! not for a single day!"

And again the handbell was rung, and the first voice resumed:—

"There is nothing more to detain you, Signor Evelyn. Nor need we ask Signor D'Urbino to remain any longer."

"By Jove! and by all the gods and goddesses in Olympus," exclaimed Evelyn to

D'Urbino, when they found themselves in the open street, with the first pale yellow of the dawn breaking in the eastern sky, "who would have dreamt that such a solemn lecture on the morals of revolutionism would have been poured forth upon my long suffering head by this National Committee you think so much about?"

"Of course I agree with the speaker," replied D'Urbino.

"And all this while where is Mephistopheles the Good, I wonder?" asked Evelyn.

"I have not the remotest conception," rejoined D'Urbino.

"If he has not come to grief," replied Evelyn, "it will somewhat astonish me, I confess."

"I trust in God he has not," was D'Urbino's anxious reply, as they parted, each to seek his home.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MARCHESE IN PERPLEXITY.

When Evelyn and his friend went out for the quiet stroll which had led them into such perilous adventures, a discussion of a very different complexion was in progress between Mrs. Sandford and the Marchese Della Porta. It was, indeed, the sight of the earnest conversation going on between the lady and the Marchese that tempted Margaret and Helen away, in the hope of a tranquil enjoyment of an Italian sky for a few minutes in midwinter itself. As soon as the cousins had left the room, the talk of the lady and gentleman grew more animated and unrestrained.

"But surely, my dear madam," said Della Porta, happy in being no longer compelled to speak in the low tones which he had hitherto adopted; "surely so admirably trained a young lady as Miss Sandford would hardly refuse to defer to her mother's judgment in the most important event of her whole life?"

"There it is, my dear Marchese," replied Mrs. Sandford, "that you fail to understand our English ways. It is just because it is the most important event in her life that Helen will refuse to let me decide for her."

"Well," rejoined Della Porta, with something like a sigh of despair; "I am all abroad still. However much I try to make out your English ways, I see clearly that I have not yet got the key to your strange social regulations."

"I don't know about the key to them, Marchese!" replied she; "but I know that if Helen does not want to marry you to

please herself, she never will marry you to please me."

"Yet she would marry with a view to being happy in her marriage, I suppose," he rejoined, "and she cannot be so good a judge of the realities of married life as her own mother."

"If you ask her," said Mrs. Sandford, "she will tell you that she is a better judge whether she will be happy with you than I can be."

"But does she not see how many love matches turn out miserably?" he argued.

"She would tell you that all marriages without love turn out miserably," said Mrs. Sandford.

"Nevertheless, very many such matches produce the utmost happiness of which the married life is capable," continued the persevering Marchese.

"I can't argue the question," rejoined she, "and when Helen is in one of her wilful moods, she sometimes tells me I can't

argue about anything. If she does marry you, she will not spare you, any more than she spares me."

"If you will forgive me for saying so," he replied, "I have occasionally noticed a certain want of deference in Miss Sandford towards her mother."

"And yet you want to marry her, Marchese?" rejoined Mrs. Sandford, surprised.

"I do, and for this very reason, that she has more character than most of our Roman ladies, and that though I was once afraid of her, the feeling is wearing off every day. I had rather be with her, and be angry with her, and have her angry with me, than be parted from her on any terms whatsoever."

"That is the most intelligible thing you have yet said," replied Mrs. Sandford. "I cannot argue with you, but I can tell when you are describing a real feeling, and not one of your artificial Italian fancies."

"Do you then believe that I entertain any such regards towards Miss Sandford, as

would justify me in assuring her that they are of the nature of your English love before marriage?" asked Della Porta.

"That I don't pretend to say, Marchese," she replied. "Certainly your feelings as you now describe them, look something like what we call a true attachment, or at least the commencement of one."

"And you consider that she regards me as nothing more than a common acquaintance, nevertheless?" he continued.

"Of that I have not the slightest doubt," she replied.

"And she would be extremely astonished if you communicated to her my proposal of this evening?" continued the Marchese.

"Of that also I have not the smallest doubt," said Mrs. Sandford. "She has suspected that if you were attracted by any one here, it was by my niece, and not by herself."

"How very extraordinary!" exclaimed the Marchese. "How wonderfully strange!

I do fervently hope that Miss Osborne herself never imagined anything of the kind. How extremely distressing!"

"On that point you may make yourself perfectly easy," said the lady. "My niece never thought of such a thing for a moment."

"Then what would you advise me to do, my dear madam?" asked the lover *in embryo*.

"If you will take my advice, Marchese," said Mrs. Sandford, "you will speak to Helen yourself. She will be far more likely to listen to you if you go about the affair more independently; she often laughs at Italian men for a want of manliness and self-reliance; and if you think to win her by negociations and management you will totally fail. Of that I am perfectly satisfied."

"How very incomprehensible it is altogether!" exclaimed the unlucky gentleman. "If there is anything that I have always dreaded, and resolved never to attempt, it is this making proposals of marriages in my

own proper person ; and what do you think she will say, my dear Mrs. Sandford?" he continued.

"She will flatly refuse you, Marchese!" she replied.

"Good heavens, Mrs. Sandford!" he exclaimed ; "and yet you say this is my only chance."

"She will refuse you without a moment's hesitation," Mrs. Sandford replied ; "but if you go to her in a straightforward, manly way, she will ground the refusal on the fact that your offer has been totally unexpected, and therefore that it is out of the question she can accept it. After that your way will be clear."

"And she will not take offence, you imagine?" asked the still hesitating man.

"Why should she take offence?" said Mrs. Sandford.

"Women are sometimes such incomprehensible creatures, my dear madam," he replied, "if you will allow me to say what I was really thinking."

"Not so incomprehensible, Marchese, as you choose to think," she said, "if only you will try to understand them."

"You said, I think, that you do not believe that Miss Sandford has determined never to marry," observed the poor bewildered gentleman.

"Marchese," rejoined Mrs. Sandford, "you are intolerably provoking. I told you that my daughter never took me into her confidence on the subject, and that I never invited it. Nevertheless, I should be astonished to hear that she was resolved to die an old maid. Go to her like a man. Tell her your feelings with perfect openness. When she says 'no,' tell her you are not surprised, for that you had hitherto adopted your Italian way of proceedings; but that, unless she insists upon breaking off the acquaintance altogether, you intend for the future to adopt the English method, and that some day you mean to try again."

"And what will she reply to such an ex-

traordinary statement?" asked he. "Really this is more than I was at all prepared for."

"I think she will say that you are totally indifferent to her, but not positively disagreeable, and that you are at liberty to try whatever you please."

"A pleasant prospect, indeed! And then I am to make love to her after your English fashion?"

"What *is* our English fashion, Marchese?" asked the lady.

"That is what most perplexes me," said the gentleman.

"My advice is, not to make love to her at all," said Mrs. Sandford. "She will know well enough what are your wishes, and everything will depend upon the study she will institute into your personal character."

"Pleasant, indeed!" rejoined Della Porta. "What an upsetting of all my careful calculations! What would my own family say to the process?"

"It is these calculations of yours that will stand in your way, my dear Marchese," she replied, "unless you get rid of them. Don't calculate at all. If you go on calculating, Helen will see through you and all your plans, and never will be satisfied that she understands you so thoroughly as to make it safe to accept you."

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "what a *bouleversement* of all the ideas I have been taught to cherish! And yet surely I have heard Miss Sandford express some sort of approval of our Italian system. Certainly, on one occasion she pointedly agreed with me in upholding *mariages de convenance.* And all the while she has never seen that I was aiming at convincing her of the excellence of the prevailing Roman custom, with a view to further my hopes as to herself."

"Helen is a wilful girl, Marchese," replied Mrs. Sandford. "She often talks nonsense intentionally, and does not intend to be taken literally."

"But what a dreadful mistake in a young lady who is not disinclined to marriage," he replied.

"You supply a proof to the contrary," suggested Mrs. Sandford. "She has attracted you, nevertheless."

"That is true!" he answered, a little consoled. "Yes!" he added, meditatively, "she is charming, even when most provoking. If there is anything I dislike in women, it is *brusquerie;* and yet in her it is almost delightful."

"And now, Marchese," returned Mrs. Sandford, "with your leave we will drop the subject for the present. Take a book, and leave me to my reflections."

So far as to take up a book, Della Porta immediately obeyed; but his restlessness was uncontrollable, and he walked to and fro until his hostess could bear it no longer, and entreated him to be still. He then sat down at a window, and gazed out into the night. Suddenly he exclaimed—

"Gracious heavens! what noise was that? It was a pistol shot, or a gun shot, and it sounded up above our heads!"

"Oh! Marchese!" cried Mrs. Sandford. "What *do* you say? That terrible revolver of Mr. Evelyn's! What can have happened?"

"Listen again!" he returned; "is that another? No," he continued, throwing open the window, and looking out as far as he could see on every side. "There are some very ugly noises, I greatly fear, and moreover, not very far from here. I strongly suspect the rumours of a coming disturbance were not so false as they were fancied."

"Not another insurrection, I trust, Marchese," cried Mrs. Sandford. "Do you mean there is to be fighting and bloodshed in the very streets before our eyes?"

"There have been fears of a rising, I grieve to say, for many weeks past, and God only knows what is to happen."

"And what are we poor women to do,

Marchese?" asked his frightened companion. "Are we to be shot in our beds, because the Holy Father and the discontented cannot agree?"

"Put your plan for going to Naples into immediate execution," he suggested. "Why not start at once? Say even to-morrow. I myself have nothing to keep me in Rome, and am at your command in everything."

"Helen! Margaret!" exclaimed Mrs. Sandford, without answering his suggestion, as the cousins entered the room. "You have been disobeying me again, and staying too long in the cold night air. Why, Margaret! my dear," she added, starting to her feet, "what has happened? You are on the point of fainting." And, indeed, but for the support of Della Porta, who rushed forwards and clasped her by the waist, Margaret would have been prostrate on the floor before she could reach a seat.

"Thank you, Marchese!" said Helen, with an attempt at a smile, which, faint as

it was, made the troubled heart of the lover bound pleasantly within him. "She will be better immediately. We have had a little alarm, mamma; but it is quite right now, and there is nothing to fear."

"A *little* alarm! my dear!" echoed her mother. "It is not a little alarm that has made you both as cold and as white as marble. You are shivering from head to foot. You will faint, yourself, in a moment."

Happily, however, neither the one nor the other either fainted, or shed tears, or in any way helped to increase the fright which they had already occasioned.

"If the Marchese will be good enough to fetch us a glass or two of wine," said Helen, "we shall soon be able to recount our surprising adventures. I had rather not call any of the servants just yet."

Had Helen perceived the gratified look with which Della Porta started off to fulfil her command, she would have wondered

what he could possibly find so exhilarating in the sight of her own and Margaret's almost deadly pallor. As for Della Porta himself, he felt that he would gladly have seen Margaret faint away half-a-dozen times if only he might play cup-bearer in the service of her fascinating cousin. As it was, the good wine did its work as efficaciously as could have been expected; and the two heroines of the narrative proceeded to tell their tale between them as best they could.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MARCHESE BEWILDERED.

They had not got through even the first part of the story, when both Mrs. Sandford and Della Porta broke out into expressions of amazement at their temerity.

"Do you mean to say," asked her mother, "that you really, and of your own free will deliberately sought for an explanation of the sounds you heard, at all risks?"

"No, my dear aunt," interposed Margaret, "it really was all my fault. Helen would have done nothing wrong if it had not been for me. And now that all is over, when you hear what we have seen, you will

forgive her for not allowing me to go alone on my rash inquiry."

Helen then resumed her account, until she came to describe the rotten state of the barrier that was supposed to divide the inmates of the two adjoining houses.

"Gracious Heavens, Helen!" exclaimed Mrs. Sandford, "is this actually true, or are you trifling with my fears? Is it possible, Marchese, that such things can take place in respectable houses in Rome? Ought we not at once to complain to the police?"

The Marchese's countenance all this while was a study for painters and physiognomists, and in after times Margaret used to amuse herself by describing the looks of mingled disgust and bewilderment with which he heard the subsequent details of the adventure, uttering in succession such a selection from the copious Italian vocabulary of ejaculations and imprecations as he considered suitable to a person of his lineage. When Mrs. Sandford appealed to him about the

police, he was only in the first stage of astonishment, and contented himself with the remark that they had better hear a little more before deciding on a step which might lead to inconvenient consequences. It was when they came to tell how they had voluntarily walked into the dark untenanted chamber, and mounted a chair for the purpose of investigating the proceedings of a man whom they supposed to be a burglar, and who might be an assassin, that the Marchese could control himself no longer.

"*Maria Santissima!*" he cried, "is it possible, Miss Sandford, that you had not sufficient influence with your cousin to persuade her from this rash enterprise?"

"Oh! I forgot to mention," said Margaret, without heeding his question, "that I took Mr Evelyn's pistol with me as we passed. It was a most fortunate thing that I did so, as you will soon learn."

"*Cielo giustissimo!*" exclaimed the Marchese, adding to himself alone, "and this is

the way with English ladies! Thank Heaven that it was not Helen that took the pistol!"

As for Mrs. Sandford, she was so thoroughly upset, that she could only open her eyes and look at Margaret, as if incredulous as to their personal relationship. When they came, however, to relate how, instead of instantly returning when they had satisfied themselves as to the nature of the man's proceedings, Helen herself had mounted a chair to watch them, Mrs. Sandford's fears gave way to anger.

"Do I hear you aright, Helen?" she asked. "Do you tell me that you willingly ran this frightful risk from mere curiosity? And let me say, too, that I think the whole proceeding was singularly unladylike and improper altogether."

"At any rate, aunt," interposed Margaret, "it was my fault, and not Helen's. I ought to have been satisfied, and not have allowed her to look for herself."

"Don't believe her, mamma!" Helen broke in, gallantly taking more than her share of the rashness; "I was as bad as she was, and her conduct when the danger really came, was splendid. That pistol was our salvation."

The Marchese lifted up his eyebrows and his hands in amazement, but said nothing, for a bitter thought crossed his mind as to the suitableness of such a girl as Helen to become his wife.

"Go on, my dear," replied Mrs. Sandford; "what happened next?"

"Now began the true terrors of the situation," replied Helen; "and you must forgive us, mamma, for I can assure you we were more terrified than I can tell you. The chair came down with a crash!"

"*Diavolo!*" exclaimed Della Porta.

"Whose chair came down?" asked Mrs. Sandford, beginning to be scared out of her senses.

"My chair, mamma!" said Helen.

"*Mille diavoli!*" cried the Marchese.

"Yes, Marchese," rejoined Helen, "so it was; but you need not be terrified about it. We are all right here at last."

"*Deo gratias!*" he murmured, with a seriousness that took Helen by surprise.

"But to proceed with our adventures," Margaret began again. "Of course we were horribly frightened, but our only chance was in staying perfectly quiet, and hoping the man would be satisfied without searching behind our curtain. It is all over now, so I could almost wish that you had seen the black-looking scoundrel's bewildered looks as he went right through into the upper part of this house in search of somebody."

"*Misericordia! misericordia!*" exclaimed Della Porta, interrupting her.

"And came back, satisfied that we had fled that way," continued Margaret.

"*Diavolo d'un ladrone!*" cried Della Porta, grinding his teeth with anger.

"And now, aunt, you must be prepared with an overflow of forgiving feeling. I ask your pardon beforehand, for really I have hardly any excuse to make for what I did next."

"For what *we* did, mamma!" Helen interposed, to the further confusion of the unhappy Della Porta.

"For what *I* did," repeated Margaret. "Helen only followed my example, because she would not let me run into danger alone."

The Marchese looked relieved, and stole a tender glance at the unconscious Helen. Margaret then related how they had returned to the chamber after the flight of the supposed thief, amidst incessant exclamations of *possibile! possibile! possibile!* from the troubled Marchese, and the increasing agitation and alarm of her aunt. And when Helen took up the story, and described the ruffian's return, the flash of his knife, and the courageous resolution of Margaret, with the final firing of the pistol,

the heart of Della Porta was torn with conflicting emotions.

"*Birbone maledetto! Diavolo uscito dall' inferno! Santa Maria! Santa Maria! Santa Maria!*"

These were his audible ejaculations, but within his breast reigned a tumult of thankfulness for Helen's escape, of wrath at the rashness that had led her into such peril, and of rage against the unknown ruffian, together with a terrible conviction that all Englishwomen are more or less mad, and that he should be mad himself to persevere in his matrimonial project after such a proof of their incomprehensible perversities.

After this point in the narrative, there was little more to tell, and Mrs. Sandford gave free vent to her pent up vexation and distress, and all the caresses and pretty pleadings of her daughter and her niece were barely sufficient to restore her good temper, and were quite insufficient to extort from her an assurance of forgiveness.

As to Della Porta, he sat moody and silent, seriously meditating whether he ought not to take the first steps towards disentangling himself from all connection with so unsatisfactory a family, by inventing some excuse for retracting his offer to escort them to Naples. There, however, sat Helen before him, every caress that she bestowed upon her mother sending a thrill through his captured heart. And when tidings were brought that the disturbances in the city were growing more and more alarming, and at last a volley of musketry was heard from the neighbouring Piazza del Popolo, startling Mrs. Sandford into a forgiving embrace of her imploring child and niece, all his hesitation vanished, and he felt that it was impossible that he could desert them in so serious an emergency.

"I suppose there is no chance of our other visitors having been mixed up with these horrid riots," observed Helen, when they had all recovered some degree of composure. "I hope you made a proper apology for our

absence, mamma, when they came back from their stroll."

"They have never returned at all, my dear," replied her mother.

"Not returned!" repeated Margaret, with a look of terror, which did not pass unnoticed by her quick-witted cousin.

"I confess that I shall begin to feel a trifle uneasy about them," remarked Della Porta, "if they do not speedily make their appearance."

Margaret's heart beat painfully fast, but she could not trust herself to utter another word, but watched the Marchese's face with keen anxiety, to learn what was his true opinion as to the gravity of the occasion. To her infinite relief, Helen suggested to him that he should make inquiries of any chance passengers in the neighbouring streets and squares as to the nature of the rioting still going on.

"I cannot think of leaving you all unprotected on such a night as this," he replied; "but so far as I can learn anything

without losing sight of this house, I will do my best to reassure you."

"You are ill, Margaret," Helen whispered to her cousin, as soon as he was gone.

Margaret shook her head feebly, but said nothing. Her look of distress was unmistakeable; and Helen grew uneasy about her. Without saying more, she quietly stole her hand into Margaret's, and felt that it was trembling violently. She pressed it tenderly, and the pressure was as tenderly returned.

"I shall be better when he returns," Margaret murmured.

Helen looked at her in some perplexity. "The Marchese can run into no danger," Helen remarked, more for the sake of saying something, than as intending to answer her cousin's unspoken thoughts.

"Of course not," Margaret replied, in a tone of entire indifference.

But when he did return, shortly afterwards, Helen saw that Margaret's efforts to control her agitation were taxing her utmost strength and energy.

"I am sorry to bring no definite news of any sort," said Della Porta, as he came in. "There is blood-shedding somewhere, and I hear of an explosion near the Colonna palace, but nothing more."

"Ask him if he has heard nothing about him—about them, I mean," said Margaret to her cousin, as soon as Della Porta was engaged in conversation with Mrs. Sandford.

"About Mr. Evelyn, and Signor D'Urbino," asked Helen.

"Yes," said Margaret, adding a hesitating suggestion as to whether Della Porta might be unwilling to inquire at Evelyn's hotel whether anything had been heard of him.

The Marchese willingly undertook the task, though but for Helen's entire unconsciousness of his hopes with regard to herself, she would have perceived that it was to gratify her far more than with any eager desire to ascertain the safety of Evelyn, that he at once complied. When he returned with the intelligence that Evelyn had not been

seen during the night, and that the master of the hotel and the servants were sitting up in dread as to what might happen, Margaret did not even look up or speak, and the only sign which she gave that she heard the information was the disappearance of the small amount of colour that yet remained in her lips.

Thus they sat, and wondered, and feared, until the night was so far advanced that Della Porta could honestly assure them, after renewed enquiries out of doors, that the city was in profound repose, and that all danger of renewed disturbances was passed away. On the slightest renewal of agitation he promised to be with them again without waiting for a summons; and then with manifest reluctance took his leave.

When Helen followed her cousin to her bed chamber for a parting kiss, the look of anguish with which Margaret returned it, filled her with dismay.

"Oh, Helen!" she faintly cried, "it is more than I can bear."

A conviction of the truth of the surmises which had at times occurred to her, flashed upon her mind.

"Is it, Mr. Evelyn, dearest?" she said, laying her hand gently on Margaret's shoulder.

Margaret said nothing, but flung her arms round her cousin's neck, and the unrestrained flood of tears that followed told her all she wished to know.

When just as the morning began to dawn, Helen lay down upon her bed, far too excited to hope for sleep, she said to herself, "Surely I was born to live and die an old maid, or why do these love-sick maidens favour me with their confidences? Who will next seek the benefit of my sympathetic advice, I wonder? Possibly our amiable Marchese, hoping to win the heart of the love-lorn Margaret herself."

CHAPTER XIV.

INVESTIGATIONS.

A MISERABLE, but scarcely unexpected sight met D'Urbino's eyes as he approached his home, after parting with Evelyn on the conclusion of his affair with the National Committee. A party of soldiers were removing the bodies of two men who had fallen in the late conflict—that of the unfortunate Captain Palma having been already borne away. From them he learnt that only three lives had been actually sacrificed, but that the wounds inflicted had been many, and probably serious.

Entering the house, he encountered his

housekeeper, who met him with a scared look, and without answering the questions he put to her, began protesting that she had done what was best, and that if he was angry at her having taken in the wounded man, she was ready to leave his service that very day. Too impatient to listen to her protestations, D'Urbino brushed past her into his studio, and beheld the explanation of her apologies. On a mattrass, hastily brought from another room, lay the Cameriere Rinaldo, his countenance colourless, and his arm bandaged with so much apparent skill, that D'Urbino guessed immediately that a surgeon had been summoned to his aid. The wounded man had fallen into an uneasy slumber, and though he moved restlessly from side to side, was not roused by D'Urbino's entrance.

For his own comfort it was fortunate that his sleep was thus uninterrupted, for assuredly the look of dismay with which D'Urbino beheld this unlooked-for sight, augured

ill for the readiness with which he would have tolerated the presence of a sick and wounded man, not only in his own house, but in the very room in which he spent by far the largest portion of his time.

Without making any attempt to awaken the sleepers, D'Urbino turned and left him, for the purpose of questioning his servant as to the history of this unwelcome intrusion on his privacy and peace. The moment he began his stern inquiries, the foolish old woman began to whimper, imagining that the sight of her tears would prove as efficacious in mollifying her master's anger as it had been on former occasions.

"Eccellenza!" she said, wiping her eyes, in her mock humility; "I knew that the Signore was your friend, and they told me that he was in the service of the Holy Father, and what could I do when I went out to see what had happened, as soon as the dreadful fighting was over?"

"Do you mean to say that you found this

gentleman lying outside in the street?" replied D'Urbino.

"I opened the door just the least in the world," said the woman; "there was such a groaning and shouting outside; and the surgeon who came up said it would kill the Signore if he was moved away; and what could I do, Eccellenza?"

Annoyed as he was, it was impossible for D'Urbino to deny the force of his servant's statement, confirmed as it was by the death-like appearance of the sleeper. He therefore dismissed her without further discussion, and returned to the studio, to meditate on the singular fatality which linked his actions with those of the incomprehensible man who lay slumbering before him. As he sat there, waiting for Rinaldo to wake without being aroused, he went over all the events of the past night, again and again, more angry and distressed about the discovery of Donato's proceedings in connection with the mosaic-worker and his household than he

liked to admit to himself. What was it to him, he thought, that a disreputable scoundrel should be aware of Giorgione's movements, and should take the opportunity of his absence to pay a midnight visit to his house, for some nefarious purpose or other?

Then came the question as to the notice he should take of it, especially as Donato was again at large, and had revealed the full malignity of his character. Should he announce all that he had seen and heard to Francesca's father, as soon as he returned to Rome? What right, indeed, had he to meddle in the matter at all? What was Giorgione to him, or he to Giorgione? Then as to Francesca herself. Was the girl the victim of some vile plot, or was she a hypocritical deceiver herself? Was there even a shadow of a foundation for Donato's infamous insinuations about her? Was there anything of the nature of a fresh political conspiracy hatching, in which Giorgione was

prominently concerned, and in which Francesca, either willingly or ignorantly, was made to take a part? If so, was it not his duty, as a man, and as a friend, to warn her of the perils she was risking? Of course she was nothing to himself, except an interesting girl now seized with an unaccountable caprice, very inconvenient indeed, but still just what might be expected from a young woman deprived of a mother's guidance from her childhood?

On the other hand, was not this very circumstance a call upon him to go out of his way, from motives of mere charity, to lend her a helping hand? If she was in real danger, or had been entrapped into a false position, it would be gross cruelty not to give her the benefit of his information and advice. Her father, again;—was he in truth the upright person he had taken him for? What was the meaning of this slumbering man's positive assertions that Giorgione's was a dangerous associate, and that

he was in communication with an unscrupulous villain? What a strange light was now thrown upon these imputations on Giorgione's character! Of course Donato was the scoundrel hinted at. And his knowledge of Giorgione's absence implied this very acquaintance between the two men which otherwise seemed too preposterous to be credited.

Again, what was Rinaldo's connection with Donato and the mosaic-worker? There lay the wounded man, still asleep, with the habitual look of weariness which he wore when awake and in health, scarcely diminished even in his slumbers. There it was, predominant over the expression of pain and of mere physical fatigue which his features now very naturally assumed. How came this weary man to be mixed up with the affairs of a scamp like Donato, and an honourable man like Giorgione? There was surely something more than mere politics and revolutionary schemes in an associ-

ation so unaccountable on ordinary grounds. The appeal made to Rinaldo by Donato at the barracks, and the furious onslaught which followed, both showed that the two men were well known to each other, and that their mutual feelings were anything but those of friendship or good will.

One conclusion alone he could determine upon, as just and right under all circumstances. He would go to Francesca in the course of the day and simply tell her what he had witnessed on the previous night. The manner in which she would receive the announcement of Donato's visit to her father's house would surely prove a guide to such further proceedings as might be called for. So far there could be no doubt; and with this determination he closed his eyes, and, worn out with fatigue and excitement, soon slept the sound sleep of health, youth, and vigour.

When he awoke the morning was far advanced, and he started to his feet, unable at

first to account for what he saw before him. Then it all rushed back like a torrent. Rinaldo lay before him, motionless, but watching with an intensity of interest almost painful to witness. The wounded man did not speak, and seemed in truth too much exhausted for the exertion; but he held out his uninjured hand as if inviting D'Urbino to come near him. It was impossible to resist the movement, accompanied with a pleading look of the eyes, which never passed away from D'Urbino's memory.

He went up to the couch where Rinaldo lay, took the outstretched hand, and kneeling by his side, bent forwards to catch the words that he wished to utter.

"You will forgive me for this," said Rinaldo, in a voice so faint as to be barely audible.

How could D'Urbino steel himself against such an appeal, or place his own inconvenience and annoyance in the balance against

the pain and anguish of which the visible tokens were before him? It was without any effort or forced courtesy that he set his uninvited guest at ease, and offered him every assistance that he could need in his present trouble. A slight pressure of his hand marked the gratitude with which the kindness was received, and the sufferer again closed his eyes, though not to sleep.

After an interview with the surgeon, who came in due course to visit his patient, and after making such arrangements as were rendered necessary by this addition to his diminutive household, D'Urbino was preparing to call upon Francesca, when a note reached him from Charles Evelyn.

"The Sandford party," it said, "are all off to Naples this very day, and I go with them. They are frightened away by last night's disturbances. It seems that Della Porta has persuaded them to go, and he is to be with them himself. I was anxious to see you before starting, but it is impossible.

I wanted to suggest to you that it might be well to give none of them any hint of our capture of that scoundrel so near their house, as there is no necessity for further alarming them, and they intend to return for Easter, if Mrs. Sandford can summon up courage for it. No doubt that scoundrel's hints about the fair Francesca are so many lies, but I suppose you will not let the matter rest where it is. At any rate, pardon a friend's hint that the less that is made public about the ugly business the better for all parties concerned."

If anything had been wanting to hasten the execution of D'Urbino's intention to go out at once and attempt to unravel the mystery in hand, it would have been supplied by this letter. He had feared that Evelyn's inclination to talk would outrun his discretion and consideration for Francesca's welfare, in which fear, indeed, he had done his new friend a signal injustice, as he now admitted on reading his communication.

Off-hand as it seemed in style, the more D'Urbino studied it, the more satisfied he was that every word and phrase had been carefully studied, and that while the writer placed no actual confidence in Donato's insinuations, he would nevertheless be glad to hear everything explained in a perfectly straightforward way without any publicity whatever.

CHAPTER XV.

OFF THE SCENT.

When D'Urbino arrived at Giorgione's house, Francesca at first refused to see him, on the ground that she was too unwell to see any one. But on his sending word that he had an important business which required immediate attention, he was admitted. She received him with so much visible agitation that his suspicions were fairly aroused, and were only partially lulled when he learnt that her father had written to say that he could not return immediately, with the additional information that she must not leave Rome for the purpose of

joining him, as he was unable to say where he would be for some days to come. The information was painful enough, as it was, to the unhappy girl; and it would have been more agitating still, had she been aware that her father was away with the view of escaping the police enquiries concerning his implication in certain proceedings of the insurgent party, which he had supposed to have been totally forgotten.

"Now you have told me this, Francesca," he began, as soon as she had finished what she had to say, "I am more convinced than I was before, that I ought to give you the information that brought me here to-day."

His grave and anxious manner terrified the poor girl even more than his words.

"It is not about my father, Signore?" she cried; "For God's sake tell me what it is."

"It is not indeed," he replied. "On that

point, calm yourself completely. But it is about another person, who, I am told, is a friend, or perhaps only an acquaintance of your father's."

"Who can it possibly be?" she answered. "My father has no friends. You yourself, Signore, are the only person he ever speaks of as a friend."

"Indeed?" rejoined D'Urbino. "The person I mean was condemned to death, and was rescued, as you remember, on his way to execution."

"What! that dreadful Donato?" exclaimed Francesca, in evident terror at the thought of him. "What can you possibly have to tell me about him?"

"Is he then an acquaintance, or companion, of your father's, Francesca?" asked D'Urbino.

"Oh! Signore," she cried, clasping her hands in anguish, "I cannot tell you; you must not ask me, I cannot tell you."

"Yet surely," he said, "you were rejoiced

when the man was rescued. Certainly you told me this at the time."

"Because I did not then know what he really was," she replied.

"And what about him since, then, Francesca?" he asked.

"Oh!" she cried, "I must not tell you, I dare not betray my father. That man is my father's curse, and my own utter misery."

"Then, Francesca," replied D'Urbino, "it is my duty to tell you that this man Donato was in this house last night, and he has insinuated that you knew of his visit."

"And you dare to come here," cried Francesca, starting to her feet, her eyes flashing with anger, and all traces of terror lost in the whirlwind of her indignation; "you dare to come here and insult me with the story, as if you partly believed it. Oh! my God!" she continued, sinking again upon her seat, and burying her face in her

hands, "it is too terrible! it is more than I can bear."

"Francesca," said D'Urbino, immeasurably distressed at the effect of his words, and speaking more tenderly than he had ever spoken to her before; "I do not believe that what he said was anything but an atrocious falsehood. I have not the shadow of a suspicion to the contrary. I swear it to you with my whole heart and soul."

And he spoke only the purest truth, though the assertion would have been scarcely true before all his doubts had vanished at the sight of her transparent sincerity and the transports of her indignation and grief.

"Francesca, my child," he continued, as she sat trembling before him in her humiliation and misery, "forgive me for my thoughtless way of speaking. I will do everything in the world that I can for you in your trouble."

"Oh! Signore!" she replied, "do not say

that. I cannot bear it. Do not, for mercy's sake, speak to me in this way."

"But, my dear Francesca," he began again—

"For God's sake, spare me! spare me!" cried the poor girl in the depths of her wretchedness.

Utterly bewildered, and yet growing every moment more resolute in his determination to assist and console her, D'Urbino was totally at a loss what next to say. After a while Francesca herself relieved him from his perplexity.

"And who is it that has spread this wicked report?" she asked.

He then described the whole affair of the previous night, to her manifest astonishment and no little alarm. It appeared that she and her maid-servant had heard nothing to arouse their fears, as they both of them had slept in rooms upon the ground floor of the house, and had attributed any unusual noises which they had heard to the street dis-

turbances which they had been told to expect. Their attention, in fact, had been completely absorbed by the occasional sounds of firing and shouting which reached their ears. What with the terror and distress caused by Giorgione's absence at such a time, and anxiety about the state of his affairs caused by a late increase in the reserve and secrecy which were at all times habitual to him, Francesca herself had been barely able to go through the whole night without completely breaking down. And now that this new distress was added to all her former sorrows, she felt as if her mind would give way altogether.

As soon as she seemed a little calmed, D'Urbino proposed to her that they should examine every room in the house and the premises throughout, with a view to detect some tokens of what must have taken place. First they proceeded to the court yard behind, where the broken surface of the wall betrayed the exact spot where Donato had

clambered over it. Turning, then, round again, they saw in a moment how he had effected his entrance. A window on the first floor was open, and a ladder sufficiently long to reach it lay upon the ground hard by.

"Tell me, Francesca," D'Urbino suddenly said, before re-entering the house, "was this man, Donato, acquainted with the position and contents of the various rooms in your house?"

"That I cannot tell," she replied. "Certainly he has been here two or three times of late, and has been closeted with my father on business upstairs. But as to the highest floors, they contain only lumber and old furniture. My father has the key, and I never go into them."

"Then we may take it for granted that this Donato knew his way about the upper stories, perfectly well, before venturing on his nocturnal visit," said D'Urbino. "And now for the chamber by which he entered."

Still nothing was to be detected, to show the purpose for which the man had come.

"If you do not object to it," D'Urbino then continued, "we will mount higher and see what these same lumber-rooms have to tell."

Following him almost mechanically, Francesca suffered him to lead the way from one floor to another, to examine every chamber and its contents.

"Now for the last of all, I suppose," he said, as they went up one more flight of stairs.

"Why, Francesca," he cried, "the door is wide open. Yes—and as I live, here is the key in the lock! Come up, child, quicker, and use your eyes in this wilderness of old rubbish. Now then, can you see any signs of housebreaking and burglary here? For I see none myself."

"It is so many years since I was in this room, that I can see nothing wrong," replied Francesca.

"By heavens, he *has* been here, nevertheless," cried D'Urbino. "Don't you see that the dust on the floor and on the furniture has been disturbed in several places? There, again, in front of that other door the dust is all swept away. Somebody must have been through that door within the last few days."

"I always thought that was the door of a closet full of books and papers," she replied.

"We will see, at any rate," he said, turning the door handle. "A closet, child—it is another room! and there is another door beyond."

And he strode forwards in expectation of some further discovery. Here, however, he was stopped; for the cousins had taken care that nothing less than no ordinary violence should force open the last barrier between the two houses.

"Here we come to an end, then, so far at least," he observed. "And now, what have

we here? Good heavens! Francesca," he broke out, after a few moments, "there has been more than one person here. These are the footprints of a woman. The dust has been swept roughly about, but there is no mistaking the marks in several places. Is it possible that the scoundrel has an ally in your servant downstairs?"

More alarmed than ever, Francesca closely examined the treacherous footmarks before she answered a word. She then placed her own foot upon several of the spots where the prints were most distinctly visible.

"No," she then replied, confidently, "they are not her marks, for her feet are big and clumsy, and these footprints are still less than those made by me. They are not all alike either. Oh! Signore," she went on, in a voice of terror, "what *can* it be?"

"Aye, indeed," he rejoined, "what can it be? And these same footprints lead right up to this further door also. Francesca!"

he added, looking grave and anxious, "this looks more serious still. Plainly there are confederates somewhere. And what a collection of rooms you have up here! They seem to cover more space than the house does below."

"This and the next house were once all in one, I have heard," she replied. "And that other door must open, I suppose, into Mrs. Sandford's house."

But for her own trouble Francesca would have laughed outright at the stare of astonishment with which D'Urbino received this piece of fresh information. Then all at once he burst into a peal of laughter himself, at the absurdity of the suggestions of his own imagination. Francesca then in her turn gazed at her companion in bewilderment.

"Only think, child," he said to her, "what a conclusion we are now brought to. The Sandford ladies are in league with the villain Donato to commit a burglary in your

father's house! What other explanation is possible? And they all went off this morning, to escape detection!"

"I can't laugh, Signore," said poor Francesa, "I am too miserable! What am I to do? Tell me, and I will do it."

"I can tell you what *not* to do," he replied, "much more easily than I can tell you what to do. There can be no doubt that for the sake of your neighbours as well as for your father's and your own sake, we should say nothing about what we have now seen, until the Sandford people come back from Naples. Of course there will be some easy way of accounting for these women's footmarks, if only we could get at it. The thing I don't like is the possibility that the maidservants next door may be in the mischief. This vagabond Donato may be in league with them. You did not happen to hear whether any jewels were lost last night?" he added.

Francesca's reply to the effect that the

young ladies had merely come in for a moment, to say good-bye to her before starting, by no means dispelled the suspicion now roused in D'Urbino's mind, and the more he turned it over and over, the more convinced he became that the whole affair was a common-place case of stealing, in which dishonest maids were the tools and the confederates of a scoundrel out-of-doors.

"It is an extremely unpleasant business," he said to Francesca, when he left her downstairs after a rather long discussion of the idea which had taken hold of him; "but it might be a vast deal worse. The thing will not be repeated, rely upon it. But I will see you to-morrow; and till then, farewell. If you want any further advice, send to me immediately."

As he went, he stretched out his hand for her to shake; a thing he had never done before. Instead of shaking it, she held it for a moment, and then, after the graceful Italian fashion when an inferior takes leave

of a superior, pressed it gently to her lips. The touch could scarcely be felt, but it told him that she was cold as ice, and his hand was wet with her tears.

END OF VOL. II.

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